

Flying Saucer Secrets Blabbed by Mad Pilot

FANTASY STORIES

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The Vengeful Pearls
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Her Lover was Jungle Gold



NOVEMBER 1950



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THE FANTASY DOCUMENTARY

EDITOR'S NOTE: Once in a lifetime, an editor comes across a story that can influence the course of history. This is such a time and such a story.

The other day, an old and cherished friend brought me an envelope containing an amazing collection of documents. Some were stamped in large, official letters, TOP SECRET. Others were so intimate that I hesitated to read them.

"These are from Major Vernon Piper, a boy I've known for twenty years," he said. "I believe he's dead, but he's asked me to tell the truth about the flying saucers. Will you help?"

I read the papers sceptically, and my first impulse was to turn them over to the United States government. My friend read my mind. "What would they do with these documents?" he asked. "They don't want the truth known, not the whole truth anyhow. Besides, you should know what happened to me on the night Vernon took his last flight. I was working at home. Not a sound came into my room except the playing of my radio, when I heard a voice. . . ."

An editor listens to many odd stories. This yarn was so different that I heard it through, re-read all of Vernon Piper's documents and letters, and came to a decision.

The papers must be published. "I'll help all I can," I said.

Since that day, the flying saucer has been thoroughly discussed and "experted" by a good many people. Don Kehoe, after talking to every responsible person who had seen a flying saucer, wrote a startling book called "Flying Saucers Are Real." It's a splendid book, too. A radio commentator revealed that the saucers were Air Force experiments—which was denied by President Truman, Secretary Johnson, and General Vandenburg. There are some who think these men protest too much. Major Vernon Piper would have thought so, but it's too late to ask him now. My friend thinks so, but I can't quote him. "I impose one condition," he said. "No publicity for me."

So I shall not mention my friend—let's call him Adam Jones—and here are the documents, for better or for worse.

Secrets of the Flying Saucers Told at Last

BY MAJOR VERNON PIPER

(Covering letter to Adam Jones from Vernon Piper, dated March 16, 1950.)

Dear Adam:

If ever you read this, I'll be dead.

I'm giving all my papers to the desk clerk of the Alamo Hotel here in Beverly Hills with instructions to forward them to you if I don't come back. They are not much but I hope you will agree that they are worth attention. As you know, I've never been a religious guy but I feel that I'm on the verge of some tremendous experience. Don't ask me to explain it. Since I joined the Air Force's flying saucer project, I've heard sounds and probed depths within myself that never existed before. My reports tell part of that story. Examine them and see what I mean.

I am flying a solo saucer patrol tonight. It's my own idea. Once, I hoped the Air Force would do it. But that is dead. Nevertheless I've got a wonderful feeling. The clerk will hold my documents ten days. Then they go to you.

So I hand you a mission. Make the world understand about flying saucers, Adam. Don't let them stop you as they have me. Goodby.

(Letter to Major Vernon Piper, Air Force Reserve, from Col. Timothy Killian, Jan. 23, 1948.)

Dear Major Piper:

This is an informal communication on a vital official matter. I am seeking expert assistance to determine whether or not the flying saucers reported so often from various parts of this country are authentic. As you may have read, a businessman-pilot was flying near Mount Rainier, Washington on June 24. He is said to have seen nine saucer-like objects flying in chain formation. He reported, "The objects were luminous

and danced in the air like saucers floating on rough water." This and hundreds of other reports have caused so much interest in Washington that I am ordered to organize a task force to track down every rumor, analyze it and report directly to the President.

If these reports are true, the foreign objects may be secret aircraft driven by physical principles that we do not understand. Or they may be visitors from some other planet, preposterous as that may seem.

Your record indicates that you are a skilled pilot and a physicist, an unusual combination. I hope you will be able to answer this call to serve your country in what may be the most significant investigation of this century. Please wire your decision.

Timothy Killian, Col. AF
Physical Intelligence Division
Air Materiel Command
United States Air Force

(Copy of a letter to Mrs. Vernon Piper, Feb. 1, 1948.)

My Darling:

This is the only moment I have found time to write since leaving home last Sunday night. That parting was so painful. Both of us said things that we did not mean. Our love is surely great enough to last out another brief separation. Read this through, my dear, and hear my thoughts.

I am in the saucer project. With non-military status. Of course I'm sworn to all sorts of secrecy. But let's talk about us. Surely you didn't mean you would divorce me if I left you for this work. You cannot mean it.

Look at it all around. We were married during the war, and I left you then for the first time. But so did twelve million other guys. We were together all of 1946 and 1947. I have never known greater happiness, and I think you, too, were contented. Only I felt that I never quite pulled my weight working in your father's chemical plant.

You looked so beautiful last Sunday, and I was so proud of you when we sat down to dinner with your father and mother and our friends. I was proud of you all through the evening, and when everyone had gone home and I told you of the letter I got from the Air Force, I thought you would be proud of me, too.

But you weren't. You said I was running away from reality. The war was finished. Russia couldn't be ready to fight for another ten years. Those ten years should be ours together. Other girls had their husbands with them, and you wanted yours. You said you would divorce me if I left home again.

My darling, life would be empty if you really meant that. You can't be serious. There is more to these reports of flying saucers than newspapers have indicated. I cannot say more than that. But believe me, this work is most important. It won't make me a millionaire. It won't buy you mink. But darling, it may keep our world alive.

Yours always. . . .

(Notes taken during briefing at Wright Field, Feb. 5, 1948.)

Briefing by chief interviewer just back from Oregon and Washington where he questioned Kenneth Arnold. Arnold was first man to report flying saucer. Flying from Chehalis, Washington to Yakima, Washington on June 24, he saw nine peculiar aircraft near Mt. Rainier. When interviewed he was positive about his experience. Quotes: "I could see their outline quite plainly against the snow as they approached the mountain. They flew very close to the mountain tops, directly south to southeast down the hog's-back of the range, flying like geese in a diagonal chain-like line, as if they were linked together. They were approximately 20 or 25 miles away and I couldn't see a tail on them. I watched for three minutes a chain of saucer-like things at least five miles long, swerving in and out of high mountain peaks. They were flat like a pie pan and so shiny they reflected the sun like a mirror. I never saw anything so fast."

Quotes: "They can call me Einstein, Flash Gordon or just a screwball but I am absolutely certain of what I saw." Speed about 1,200 miles per hour.

Met a fellow named Hynek, Ohio State astro-physicist, doing independent investigation. Believes Arnold was fooled by a mirage. We'll see.

(Letter to George Beach, lawyer, Feb. 2, 1948.)

Dear George:

Things have happened so fast that you may not know I'm engaged in

a screwball search. The government wants to know if flying saucers are real. I'm one of a bunch of guys who have sworn to find out.

But this letter is about Mary. I'm afraid we're at a crossroads. Mary can't understand why I took this job rather than stay in her dad's chemical factory. But you'll understand, and perhaps you can make her see that I love her just as much as ever—more if that is possible—and there is a big job here.

Mention flying saucers to the guy on the street and he gives you a horse laugh. I'm not sure we're not up against something new in this world. Two things worry me. If the saucers are secret machines developed by Russia, we'd better do something about it or pick up our marbles and move off this globe.

The other thing is the attitude of these clams down here in Dayton. You remember the old Army. Set up a new project and you got all the misfits and culls that every other commander wanted to unload. Maybe that happened here. Some guys are regulars and some are reserves and I don't know which is worse. They're convinced there're no such things as flying saucers. Their minds are closed. The Russians are too dumb. And no other planet has any sort of life on it. Damn 'em!

Just one guy I've met seems to know the score. Dave Zimmerman, ex-FBI. MIT honor graduate. His last job was with Aeronautical Advisory Committee at Langley Field, in charge of their skin friction project. We're taking an apartment together.

Tell Mary this work is important. Make her see the size of it. Good God! What if there is life on other planets? I've got to know.

(Notes on report of Ky. Nat. Guard case.)

Subject: Captain Thomas F. Mantell, Kentucky National Guard. On January 7, a half-dozen observers at Godman Air Force Base, Ft. Knox, Ky., saw an object in the sky that looked like a huge ice cream cone topped with red. Four National Guard F-51 planes were in the air, commanded by Captain Mantell. The Godman tower asked them to investigate. Mantell made visual contact with the object and called the tower to say it was traveling at half his speed at twelve o'clock high. Then he closed in. Object looked metallic and of tremendous size. Mantell was going 360 mph. As he closed, the object matched his speed. He reported, "I'm going up to 20,000 feet and if I'm no closer,

I'll abandon chase." He had no oxygen equipment and higher flight was dangerous. The other three planes had already dropped out. That was last radio contact with Mantell. His body was found later that day in his wrecked plane.

Talked to all persons who saw object, including three flyers at first with Mantell. All agree it was something huge, metallic, and could soar straight up at tremendous speed. These witnesses were professional pilots. They know planes and aerodynamics. So many experts couldn't be wrong about seeing something. The question, what did they see?

(Copy of recommendation to CO, Air Intelligence Div.)

Subject: Formation of Sky Sweeper Patrol of Project Saucer.

1. We are presently investigating every instance of which we have a record in which unidentified aerial objects have been reported.

2. We are compiling a mass of conflicting testimony which may lead us to a confused result.

3. New reports continue to arrive of fresh sightings which must be investigated. As we accumulate a backlog of assignments, the memory of witnesses fails and the trail grows cold. The present staff cannot possibly run down each reported sighting.

4. Competent, on-the-spot observers are needed to report immediately, thereby eliminating tricks of memory.

5. The following recommendations are made:

a. That the present method of investigating be restricted to those sightings reported by persons who are qualified to express aeronautical opinion.

That a sky sweeper patrol be set up in the areas from which reports have come most frequently, notably the West Coast, consisting of expert observers equipped with jet planes and stratosphere suits.

6. It is believed that such an employment of manpower would expedite the objective of this mission.

(signed) Vernon Piper,
Investigator, Project Saucer.

(Page torn from a notebook, dated March 9.)

Dave Zimmerman and I got to talking last night. Both of us have been out of town since first of February. When I mentioned Kentucky

case in which Major Mantell was killed, he told me several officers and men saw a similar object two hours later over Ohio at Lockbourne Air Force Base near Columbus. It could have been the same. Arnold figured his nine disks were doing 1,200 mph. At that rate, they could cross the continent in two hours.

(Letter to Mrs. Vernon Piper, April 10, 1948.)

My Dearest,

There is no time to write, no time for anything. And my tongue is tied by the secrecy of these investigations. But I can say that I love you and am so happy that you have decided to give me a year in which to "work this foolishness out of my system." This isn't foolishness, my darling. Sleep on that always. This is so un-foolish that it scares me. All my love always.

(Letter to George Beach, May 20, 1948.)

Dear George:

I cannot thank you enough for talking Mary out of the Reno trip. For the first time since I undertook this assignment, I feel some peace of mind. But not peace of body. It's an eerie experience, working in a field where you know your results are impossible. We're using FBI technique. Amass a million facts and maybe we'll find a pattern. I've flown all over the country talking to witnesses. Some repeat old rumors. Some are fakers. Some are sincere amateurs. Until we set up a sky-sweeper patrol, manned by persons competent to observe, we'll get nowhere. I've made a recommendation. It's probably entangled in a million miles of red tape.

Funny thing happened last week. I got back from a movie with Jimmy, my roommate, and we found the place ransacked. Not a drawer had been missed. The mattress was ripped. Whoever checked us did it good. I've had the feeling lately I'm being followed. It could be our own G2 boys checking on my loyalty, I suppose. It's a queer feeling.

(Official letter to Vernon Piper from Col. Timothy Killian.)

Subject: Disapproval of Sky-Sweeper Patrol Recommendation.

1. Your recommendation for abandonment of present type investigation in favor of establishment of sky-sweeper patrols is received.
2. Funds, equipment and trained personnel are not available for pur-

pose of recommendation.

3. Recommendation disapproved.

(signed) Timothy Killian, Col AF
Air Intelligence Div.
Air Materiel Command
U. S. Air Force

(Notes on sheet of tablet paper under heading, "Memo to me on talk with Killian, Aug. 19, 1948.)

Told Killian of investigation I made of Ranger Talbutt on Smokey Mountain case. Talbutt sighted saucers and kept them in view for two hours. If we'd had a jet patrol up he could have made radio contact and brought a qualified investigator up in thirty minutes. Killian said forget it. I'm hired to interview witnesses. I asked if he objected to my using my head, too. He replied "I'm afraid you're going to make trouble, Piper." When I asked for results of consolidated reports he evaded me. Either reports haven't been consolidated, in which case someone ought to be court martialed, or Washington doesn't want results. Killian's attitude is old school tie. Unless you graduated from West Point, you're probably a liar. Why wouldn't the Pentagon want these reports released? Are they afraid of the truth? What is the truth? Interesting questions.

(Report to Commanding Officer, Physical Intelligence Division, Jan. 23, 1949.)

Subject: Facts Pertaining to Death of David Zimmerman.

1. David Zimmerman and I roomed together since early 1948. We became well acquainted during that period and shared many evenings.

2. Both of us have noticed at various times that we were being followed. We assumed they were checkers from our G2 or FBI departments until May 14 when our room was ransacked. After that, I failed to note further "tailing" activity.

3. On the evening of January 21, Zimmerman came to our apartment elated at what he stated was proof of the existence of a flying saucer. He had been questioning West Virginia salesman Eddie Groves who turned over films that he shot at a distance of 150 feet. The day was bright and cloudless. There could be no doubt that the saucer picture

was on the films.

4. Zimmerman left the apartment to go to the Air Film Lab to have his negative developed. Twenty minutes later he telephoned from a drug store to ask me to meet him immediately at the PX.

5. I thought his voice sounded queer but not enough to cause concern. When I reached the PX, he was not there. I waited thirty minutes and returned home. When I opened the door, windows were open and the contents of closets and drawers were heaped on the floor.

6. When I called Military Police they told me they had found Zimmerman in a phone booth, dead of a knife wound. An empty film carton was in his coat pocket.

7. I did not see the carton open during the time Zimmerman and I discussed the film. However, his actions clearly indicated that he knew a film was in the carton. If it was not present when his body was found, the only conclusion is that it was removed by parties unknown.

(Copy of letter to George Beach, Feb. 24, 1949.)

Dear George:

Time for a talk. Perhaps you read that Dave Zimmerman was killed last month. My reason for this letter is that something similar might happen to me. If it does, and I don't want to sound melodramatic, please make a special effort to look after Mary. She's a helpless kid unless somebody is around to make with the advice. That's been your job so many times I hope you'll always be within arm's reach. Not that anything is bothering me more than usual, but I've seen several pretty husky characters turn up recently when I've stopped for a drink. Maybe I'm just moody after the way they stuck a knife into Zimmy.

Now settle down for a spell, partner. I've got to talk out something and you're the fall guy. I wrote a long time ago that this thing looked very big. Now it's bigger. Its almost big enough to be a national scandal. For one thing, Washington is dodging the issue. I believe that the Project Saucer was established because the newspapers demanded it, and to get the Air Force off a hook if anyone did discover a genuine article.

Not that I've shaken hands with any Man from Mars but I've reached the point where I think it possible. Dammit, it *is* possible,

George. If a little piece of humanity weighing 150 pounds can figure out how to transmute material into force (Einstein did) and another drink of water weighing about 170 pounds can actually turn the trick (that's Oppenheimer) and create a heat here on this earth as great as that on the face of the sun, then it's time for us to believe in *anything*.

The universe is a lot of territory. Is it conceivable that we have a monopoly on this thing called life? The church says yes. I don't believe God is that small. Surely, in all the billions of square miles of space in which we are the tiniest speck, there is at least *one* other world. How in Hell can we be so brash as to assume we're the whole *living* works? What I'm saying is that space ships are possible. Now, can I prove it?

Nossir! I can't! I've talked to dozens of people, however, who say they saw 'em. All shapes and all sizes. I've got a funny feeling that I'll see the real thing before this hitch is finished. But the important thing in the meantime is to find out where we stand.

One question is clearly answered. The saucers are not Russian. We've got positive information which rules that out. But that leaves two other possibilities. Either they are imaginary or they are real. If they are imaginary, the public ought to know so they can stop being scared of their shadows. If they are genuine, even if there is the slightest chance that they might be real, then we'd better put that possibility straight before the public before something falls on an American city and we jump to the conclusion that it's the Russians and start shooting our atom bombs at them.

Could it be—I've read this somewhere—that some non-world Intelligence wants us to do just that, so the Russians would turn around and shoot their atom bombs at us until we destroyed each other?

True or false, the public should know whatever we know. Which leads to this: How do I spring the facts out of Colonel Killian's brass-bound head. Not through channels. Not through Air Force public relations.

I heard Drew Pearson on the air the other night. He's a guy with guts. That might be an idea. They say he also knows the President or is it the other way 'round. Who called who an s.o.b.? Well, I've blown my top, George, and I think I'd better tell you that this letter can bring me a court martial or its equivalent. Don't flash it around.

I want to hang myself in my own time and manner. It won't be long now.

(Copy of a letter to the President of the United States, April 3, 1949.)

Dear Mr. President:

I am currently employed on Project Saucer by the U.S. Air Force. Since the establishment of that project, I have interviewed hundreds of persons who claim to have seen flying saucers. As a result of that unique experience, I say that it is probable that flying saucers (or space craft) have visited the earth at least several times during 1948 and 1949.

Is it wise to keep the possibility of these visits secret? As a conscientious American, I seek an answer. Could it be that someone does not want the truth known? Who is that person or persons?

My closest friend was murdered because he had in his possession photographs which might have proved the existence of a non-world space ship. The films were missing when his body was recovered.

I see no activity in the higher echelons of my command to indicate that anything but evasion and indecision will result unless there is a high inquiry into this project. You can force the issue. Are the saucers from Russia, from Mars, or fakes or hoaxes? My reports are a considerable part of several thousand interviews. Put them before the public.

Visitations by strange craft are still being reported over various states and our present investigations are getting nowhere. I have recommended the creation of a sky-sweeper patrol to my superiors who rejected it. I suggest it to you, and herewith volunteer for such duty. Machines and men can be borrowed from the Air Force. We could investigate any area within minutes. The present survey has taken more than a year and produced nothing.

Only an earnest desire to serve my country as well as a conviction that a terrible tragedy looms over us forces me to make this direct appeal. Yours very respectfully . . .

(Associated Press Dispatch.)

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 14, 1950. President Truman sent a directive to the Pentagon today ordering the Secretary for Air to

report on the progress of the Air Force study called Project Saucer. Secretary Symington is expected to summon project officers from Wright Field at once.

(Clipping from radio column, Washington Ledger, April 15, 1949.)

"Rumor is buzzing along radio row that Drew Pearson, radio commentator, will go to the mike with some sensational flying saucer disclosures on Sunday night next when he says 'I predict.'"

(Copy of letter to George Beach, April 25, 1949.)

Dear George:

I am in Washington with Colonel Killian. When I left Dayton, I thought our report would shake the earth. I forgot I was still working with titmice. Is that a word? Micel! These last days have taught me one thing. Generals can be more scared even than colonels, and politicians can be more scared than both.

We've written our report. It will be issued presently. I'm sending you a copy which I hope you will hide. It says everything and then begs the issue. Damn! But I've just begun to fight.

Have you seen Mary recently? She wrote last week to say that my year is long since up and I must give up chasing the holy Grail. I suspect she is serious this time.

(Copy of rough draft of digest of preliminary studies made by Air Materiel Command, Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio on "Flying Saucers.")

REPORT ON FLYING SAUCER PROJECT

Official birthday for "Saucer" was January 22, 1948. Since then, AMC's Technical Intelligence Division, charged with the collection, investigation and interpretation of data relative to unidentified flying objects, has looked into more than 240 domestic and 30 foreign incidents. With assistance from several other government and private agencies, and with the entire facilities of the Wright Field laboratories at their disposal, Project "Saucer" personnel have already come up with identification of about 30 percent of the sightings studied thus far as conventional aerial objects. It is expected that further probing of in-

cidents in relation to weather balloon locations, etc., will provide commonplace answers to at least an equal number of the sky riddles.

But to date, there are still question marks in the "Saucer Story."

Of course, the possibility that some of the incidents reported to AMC Intelligence may represent technical developments far in advance of knowledge available to American engineers and scientists has been widely considered. But observations based on experience with nuclear power plant research in this country label as "highly improbable" the existence on Earth of engines small enough in size and weight to have powered any of the capricious "saucers." The other obvious possibility—visitations from Mars, Venus, or distant planets attached to other star systems—is also looked upon as an almost complete impossibility.

In short, while Project "Saucer" evaluation teams report that no "definite and conclusive evidence is yet available to either prove or disprove the existence of at least some of the remaining unidentified objects as real aircraft of unknown and unconventional configuration," exhaustive investigations have turned up no alarming probabilities.

FOREIGN SIGHTINGS

While the vast majority of saucers reported to Air Force intelligence have been seen over the continental United States, they have also appeared around the globe. Sightings have been reported, for example, over Newfoundland, Alaska, Asuncion, Paraguay; Gadbjerg, Denmark; Lake Dorian (at the Yugoslav-Greek frontier), Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Turkey, Hawaii, etc.

In April of 1948, 1st Lt. Robert W. Meyers of the 67th Fighter Wing, 18th Fighter Group, Philippine Islands, was leading a flight of four F-47's when he sighted an unidentified aerial object about three miles away. As Meyers wheeled his fighter around, the object made a simultaneous 90° turn left and disappeared in about five seconds. No exhaust trails were observed. Meyers said the object appeared to be a flying wing type of aircraft, silver in color and resembling a half moon with what seemed to be a dorsal fin barely perceptible.

On May 8, 1948, citizens of Middleport, Ohio, reported sighting several disc-shaped objects traveling across the sky at two minute intervals. One observer said they resembled "a large clock face covered

with radium and sailing through the air."

SPACE SHIP

Perhaps the fantastic saucer, sighting in Technical Intelligence records was the widely-publicized "space ship" which two Eastern Air Lines pilots reported encountering in the skies around Montgomery, Alabama, last July. Presumably the same object was seen by ground observers at Robbins Air Force Base, Macon, Georgia, about an hour before. All reports agreed it was going in a southerly direction, trailing vari-colored flames and that it behaved like a normal aircraft insofar as disappearing from the line of sight was concerned.

The EAL pilots, Capt. C. S. Chiles and John B. Whitted described the phenomena as a "wingless aircraft, 100 feet long, cigar shaped and about twice the diameter of a B-29 with no protruding surfaces."

"We saw it at the same time and asked each other 'What in the world is this?'" Chiles told investigators. "Whatever it was, it flashed down toward us and we veered to the left. It veered to its left and passed us about 700 feet to our right and above us. Then, as if the pilot had seen us and wanted to avoid us, it pulled up with a tremendous burst of flame from the rear and zoomed into the clouds, its prop wash or jet wash rocking our DC-3."

The flame-shooting mystery craft, as described by the EAL pilots, had no fins, but appeared to have a snout similar to a radar pole in front, and gave the impression of a cabin with windows above.

Captain Chiles declared the cabin "appeared like a pilot compartment, except brighter." He said the illumination inside the body itself approximated the brilliance of a magnesium flare.

"We saw no occupants," he told investigators. "From the side of the craft, came an intense, fairly dark blue glow that ran the entire length of the fuselage . . . like a blue fluorescent factory light. The exhaust was a red-orange flame, with a lighter color predominant around the outer edges."

The pilots said the flame extended 30 to 50 feet behind the object and became deeper in intensity as the craft pulled up into a cloud. Its speed was said to be about $\frac{1}{3}$ faster than common jets.

In their investigation of the incident, Project "Saucer" personnel screened 225 civilian and military flight schedules and found that the

only other aircraft in the vicinity at the time was an Air Force C-47. Application of the Prandtl theory of lift to the incident indicated that a fuselage of the dimensions reported by Chiles and Whitted could support a load comparable to the weight of an aircraft of this size at flying speeds in the sub-sonic range.

The object is still considered "Unidentified."

* * * * *

Another fantastic saucer tale came "out of the mouths of babes" in Hamel, Minn. Two children playing in their back yard one afternoon last August reported seeing a strange object about 12 feet off the ground descending between them.

"It hit the ground, spun around once, made a whistling noise and then shot straight up into the sky about 20 feet, stopped again and made more whistling noises," the children reported.

They told their parents the object then shot up about 10 feet more, maneuvering around the branches and telephone wires, and suddenly sped off to the northwest. They said the disc was about two feet in diameter and of a dull gray color. Soil analysis of a recession in the earth where the children claimed the disc had landed proved negative.

* * * * *

The whole flying saucer story was started on June 24, 1947 by Kenneth Arnold, of Boise, Idaho, who saw what he reported as a chain of saucer-like objects playing tag with jagged peaks of Mt. Rainier in Washington. He said they flew at fantastic speed. In the days that followed Arnold's observation, the disc reports began to snowball. At Muroc, California, a group of Air Force officers reported spotting spherical objects of a disc-like shape whirling through the sky at a speed in excess of 300 MPH.

In Portland, Oregon, several policemen told investigators they saw a group of discs that "wobbled, disappeared and reappeared" several times. They were described as resembling "shiny chromium hub caps."

These objects were not of astronomical origin, according to Dr. Hynek's report.

Regarding the Portland incident, he stated "There is nothing whatever in this incident to suggest that the objects observed were of astronomical origin. The maneuvers of the objects and the relatively long time they were in sight preclude their being astronomical."

Only a few days after Arnold's sighting, a disc was reported seen over his hometown of Boise—"a half-circle in shape, clinging to a cloud and just as bright and silvery looking as a mirror caught in the rays of the sun."

Early in August, 1947, two pilots for a Bethel, Alabama, flying service told investigators they spotted a huge black object "bigger than a C-54" silhouetted against the brilliant evening sky. In order to avoid collision they said they pulled up to 1,200 feet and watched the object cross their path at right angles.

The two pilots told of swinging in behind the object and following it at 170 MPH until it outdistanced them and disappeared from sight about four minutes later. They described it as "resembling a C-54 without motors, wings or visible means of propulsion . . . smooth surfaced and streamlined." No balloons were reported in the area.

A few days later, at Ft. Richardson, Alaska, two officers told of sighting a spherical object about 10 feet in diameter flying through the air at tremendous speed, leaving no vapor trail.

Another incident still in "Saucer's" Unidentified File took place 5,000 feet above sea level in the Cascade Mountains. Fred M. Johnson, a Portland prospector, told authorities he noticed a strange reflection in the sky and, looking up, spotted five or six discs about 30 feet in diameter. Johnson said he grabbed his telescope and watched the discs approximately 50 seconds while they banked in the sun. He described them as being round with tails, making no noise and not flying formation.

Johnson said that while the discs were in sight the hand on his compass-watch weaved wildly from side to side.

Perhaps the most super-sized "saucer" ever sighted was one an Oklahoma City man reported as "seeming to be the bulk of six B-29's." The observer, who holds a private pilot's license, spotted the object from the ground. He said at first it looked like a big white plane, but moving closer became perfectly round and flat with no protrusions. He heard no sound and reported the speed as "probably three times that of a jet."

A unique chapter in the saucer story was written last October by Lt. George F. Gorman of the North Dakota National Guard who said

he had a 27-minute dogfight with a flying saucer in the skies over Fargo.

Gorman, manager of a Fargo construction company, told this story to project investigators:

On the night of October 1, 1948, he was preparing to land at the Fargo airport after a routine F-51 patrol flight. Cleared by the tower to land, Gorman noticed what appeared to be the tail light of another plane about 1,000 yards away. He queried the tower and was told that the only other aircraft over the field was a Piper Cub which he could see outlined plainly below him. He saw no outline of anything around the moving light.

Gorman closed in to take a look at the mystery light.

"It was about six to eight inches in diameter, clear white and completely round with a sort of fuzz at the edges," he said. "It was blinking on and off. As I approached, however, the light suddenly became steady and pulled into a sharp left bank. I thought it was making a pass at the tower.

"I dived after it and brought my manifold pressure up to 60 inches, but I couldn't catch up with the thing. It started gaining altitude and again made a left bank," Gorman told investigators.

"I put my F-51 into a sharp turn and tried to cut the light off in its turn. By then we were at about 7,000 feet. Suddenly it made a sharp right turn and we headed straight at each other. Just when we were about to collide I guess I got scared.

"I went into a dive and the light passed over my canopy at about 500 feet. Then, it made a left circle about 1,000 feet above, and I gave chase again."

Gorman said he cut sharply toward the light which was once more coming at him. When collision again seemed imminent, the object shot straight into the air. Gorman climbed after it to 14,000 feet when his plane went into a power stall. The object turned in a northwest north heading and disappeared.

During the "dogfight" Gorman said he noticed no deviation on his instruments, no sounds, odors or exhaust trails from the object.

Its speed, he said, was excessive. At times during the chase, his F-51 was under full power with speed varying from 300 to 400 MPH. In all, the light was observed more than 27 minutes. Gorman described

it as having depth although it appeared flat.

The mystery light was also seen by L. D. Jensen, Airport Traffic Controller at Fargo, who watched it with a pair of binoculars. He said he was unable to distinguish any shape or form other than what appeared to be the tail light of a very fast-moving craft.

In a certified statement Gorman, who was a pilot instructor for French military students during World II, said he was convinced there was "thought" behind the maneuvers. He declared, "I am also convinced that the object was governed by the laws of inertia because its acceleration was rapid but not immediate and although it was able to turn fairly tight at considerable speed, it still followed a natural curve.

The object could out-turn and outspeed the F-51 and was able to attain a much steeper climb and to maintain a constant rate of climb far in excess of the Air Force fighter.

"When I attempted to turn with the object I blacked out temporarily due to excessive speed," Gorman stated. "I am in fairly good physical condition and I do not believe there are many if any pilots who could withstand the turn and speed effected by the light and remain conscious."

From a psychological aspect, the Gorman incident raised the question, "Is it possible for an object without appreciable shape or known aeronautical configuration to appear to travel at variable speeds and maneuever intelligently?"

* * * * *

The saucer sightings have spread over into 1949. On New Year's Day of this year, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Rush of Jackson, Mississippi, were coming in for a landing at Dixie Airport, Jackson, in a Stinson civilian plane when they sighted an unidentified aerial object they first described as being cigar-shaped with short, stubby wings and resembling a rocket. The Rushes later changed their description to a "wingless aircraft." They said it was about 60 feet long and 10 feet in diameter, with one end tapered to a four foot trailing edge. It crossed 500 feet in front of them, they reported, turned to the southwest, accelerated from a speed of about 200 MPH to 500 MPH and flew out of sight. Rush is a former USAF pilot and both he and his wife hold private pilot licenses.

ASTRONOMICAL ORIGINS

Preliminary study of the more than 240 domestic and 30 foreign incidents by Astro-Physicist Hynek indicates that an over-all total of about 30 percent can probably satisfactorily be explained away as astronomical phenomena.

For example, on February 18, 1948, a terrific explosion high in the sky over Northern Kansas rocked buildings, broke windows and terrified residents over a wide section of Kansas, Nebraska and Oklahoma.

Fantastic tales were associated with the phenomena. A Stockton, Kansas, farmer reported that shortly before the explosion he saw a strange "saucer" hovering over his home. He said when he came within about six feet of the object it stopped in the air almost level with his face and "wobbled around for an instant with fire belching out and then being sucked back in."

The farmer described the object as about four feet long and shaped "something like a funnel."

Suddenly sparks showered from it, and the fire increased as if a fuse had been lighted, he declared.

"It took off in a northwest direction very fast, gaining altitude as it went," he told investigators. "My wife came out and watched it fly off leaving a trail of smoke. Suddenly a great cloud of smoke appeared in the sky and a few seconds later we heard a terrible explosion. I could feel the heat from where the object had come near the ground."

Scores of residents over the country side reported seeing flashes of light and hearing the explosion. The object left a smudge of bluish-white smoke extending across a wide segment of the sky.

Although the phenomena was immediately thought to be a fireball, some mystery and "saucer talk" surrounded it until definite proof came the following April. Oscar Monnig, Texas astronomer, reported that meteorites had been recovered, including a 109-pound piece which was discovered embedded about two feet in the soil. It was an "achondrite,"—technical name for an unusual type of stony meteorite.

On the same day that Kenneth Arnold saw his Mt. Ranier saucers, Lt. Gov. Donald S. Whitehead of Idaho said he spotted a comet-shaped object hanging motionless in the western Idaho sky, which seemed, after a time, to disappear below the horizon with the rotation of the earth.

In his recent report, Dr. Hynek said it seemed likely Lt. Governor Whithead observed either the planet Saturn or Mercury. A bright planet shining through thin cirrus clouds could give the impression of a comet-like object, he stated.

On July 20, 1947, observers off the Newfoundland coast reported seeing a series of silver to reddish flashes in the sky, although the object from which they came was not visible. Dr. Hynek states in his report these flashes were probably nothing more than a fireball.

Early in the saucer sensation—mid-July of 1947—capture of a “flying disc” excited residents of Jackson, Ohio. Later, however, the “saucer” was identified as a U. S. Army Signal Corps Radisonde Transmitter used for gathering weather data.

BALLOONS

Various weather and research balloons have been found at the source of a great number of saucer incidents.

One of the most startling occurred last November at Camp Springs, Maryland. From a plane, an object illuminated by a continuous glowing white light was observed flying on a 360° pattern west to east over Andrews Air Force Base. As the pilot made a pass to check on the object he said it took definite evasive action. He switched his wing and tail navigation lights off, but as he again tried to close in, the “saucer” flew up and over his plane. He reported the mystery craft’s speed as seeming to alternate from 80 MPH to five or six hundred MPH. The pilot said it appeared like an oblong ball with one light and no wings or exhaust flames visible. Smaller than a T-6 aircraft, this “saucer” was reported to be highly maneuverable and capable of near-vertical flight.

The mystery was cleared up when the object was identified positively as a cluster of cosmic ray research balloons.

The first photograph of a “flying saucer” was believed to have been made on July 5, 1947, by Frank Ryman, Seattle Coast Guard yeoman. The results (photographed from the ground) showed a tiny light spot about the size of a pin-head against the dark background of an evening sky. However, the object is now believed to have been a synoptic weather balloon.

On April 8, 1948, several witnesses reported seeing an object vari-

ously described as "an oblong silver streak" "a large cylindrical body resembling an opalescent mother of pearl stick" "a vaporous cylinder" and "a white sphere," was seen by several ground observers over Ashley and Delaware, Ohio. At Delaware, the airport and the Perkins Observatory were alerted, but both were unable to sight the object. Later, it was determined that weather balloons were in the area at the time of the sightings.

HOAXES

The nation's practical jokers and publicity seekers also have played a role in Project "Saucer."

One of the biggest tempests was stirred up by two Tacoma, Wash., men, Fred Chrisman and Harold A. Dahl. In July, 1947, a few days after Kenneth Arnold's Mt. Rainier saucers hit the headlines, Dahl reported sighting six discs from a boat in which he was patrolling off Maury Island, Washington.

Dahl said one of the discs fluttered to earth and disintegrated, showering his boat with fragments which caused some damage and killed his pet dog. He and Chrisman then attempted to sell the story to a Chicago adventure magazine which in turn contacted Kenneth Arnold in Boise and asked him to check its authenticity.

Arnold went to Tacoma with Capt. Emil J. Smith, United Airlines pilot, who had also received "saucer" publicity when he reported seeing discs on the Fourth of July while on a routine flight out of Boise.

From Tacoma, Arnold summoned two officers of Army A-2 Intelligence to aid in the investigation of Dahl and Chrisman's claim. Thus began a story of secret hotel room meetings and mysterious anonymous telephone calls which ended in death for two of the participants and exposed the Tacoma disc story as a hoax.

At a meeting in the Winthrop Hotel, Dahl produced some fragments which he alleged came from the disc which damaged his boat. He related his entire story of the incident to Arnold, Smith and the two Army Intelligence men. The next day the two officers left to return to Hamilton Field, Calif., to participate in an Air Force Day program, taking some of the fragments with them for technical analysis.

But tragedy struck en route. The plane crashed, killing both officers

although the crew chief and a hitch hiker—the other two passengers—parachuted to safety.

Shortly after the crash, newspapers and wire services in Tacoma began receiving a series of anonymous telephone calls informing them that the fallen B-25 had been carrying “flying disc” fragments and that the plane had been shot down from the air with a 20 mm cannon by saboteurs. While one Tacoma paper hinted that the plane had been sabotaged because of the disc fragments it carried, a thorough investigation of the crash revealed no indication of foul play. (The crash was caused by a burned exhaust stack which in turn caught the left wing afire. The blazing wing broke from the fuselage and tore off the plane’s tail.)

The mysterious caller added that a U.S. Marine Corps plane found a few weeks before on Mr. Rainier had also been shot down by the unidentified “saucer saboteurs.”

On the day of the crash, Chrisman and Dahl took Captain Smith to view the boat which allegedly had been damaged by the falling disc.

“I saw what may have been repairs to the windshield and lights, but I was not personally satisfied that they were made as a result of the claimed incident,” Smith told investigators.

Later under questioning, Chrisman and Dahl broke and admitted that the fragments they had produced were really unusual rock formations found on Maury Island and had no connection with “flying discs.”

They admitted telling the Chicago magazine that the fragments “could have been remnants of the discs” in order to increase the sale value of their story.

During the investigation, Dahl’s wife consistently urged him to admit that the entire affair was a hoax, and it is carried as such in Project “Saucer” files.

* * * * *

July of 1947 was a banner month for the practical jokers. A Seattle, Wash., woman excitedly reported to police that flaming flying disc had landed on her roof. The object, which was quickly extinguished, was turned over to Federal agents and examined by Navy bomb and electronics experts. It consisted of a 28-inch circular piece of plywood cupped up on two sides and held in position by a wire stretched across the center. The letters “USSR” and “EYR” and a hammer and sickle

were painted on the disc in white. Two radio tubes and a quart cylindrical shaped oil can were mounted on pieces of bakelite inside the object and a cloth saturated with a turpentine-like substance and charred from burning was attached to it. Final concensus was that the disc could not fly and was undoubtedly the work of practical jokers.

The population of Shreveport, La., had its share of disc excitement when a resident reported seeing a "saucer" whirl through the air, shooting smoke and fire, and come to rest on a downtown thoroughfare. A police investigation, however, revealed that the "saucer" was the work of a prankster who launched the homemade disc from the top of a downtown office building as a joke on his boss. This "saucer" employed a starter from a fluorescent light and two electric fan condensers.

A flying disc became big business in Black River Falls, Wisc., where the finder charged 50 cents admission for a look at the "saucer" until local police stepped in and shut it up in a bank vault. The contrivance, which was fashioned from plywood and cardboard was supposedly seen in flight near Black River Falls shortly before an electrician said he found it lying in deep grass on the town fairgrounds. After analysis at Mitchel Field, the following report was made:

"This contrivance is patently a hoax—it will be held for a reasonable length of time and then disposed of in the nearest ash receptacle."

Other remains of "grounded discs" were also determined to be hoaxes. Usually they were crudely contrived practical jokes. Analysis of the pieces of one "flying saucer" which crashed to the ground in a farmer's field at Danforth, Ill., and burned the weeds in the area to a fine ash, revealed plaster of paris fragments, part of an outmoded magnetic speaker diaphragm, bakelite coil forms wrapped in enameled copper, wire, a metallic box, the remains of an electronic condenser manufactured in New York City, and the vestiges of a metallic magnetic ring.

Of such things are some of the saucers made.

* * * * *

But the hoaxes and the crank letters in reality play a small part in Project "Saucer."

Actually, it is a serious, scientific business of constant investigation, analysis and evaluation which thus far has yielded evidence pointing to the conclusion that much of the saucer scare is no scare at all, but can be attributed to astronomical phenomena, to conventional aerial objects, to hallucinations and to mass psychology.

But the mere existence of some yet unidentified flying objects necessitates a constant vigilance on the part of Project "Saucer" personnel, and on the part of the civilian population. Investigation of the phenomena is greatly stepped-up when observers report incidents as soon as possible to the nearest military installation or to Headquarters, AMC, direct.

FROM ANOTHER PLANET

Since flying saucers first hit the headlines almost two years ago there has been wide speculation that the aerial phenomena might actually be some form of penetration of the earth from another planet.

Kenneth Arnold was pointed to for months as "the man who saw the Men from Mars."

Actually, astronomers are largely in agreement that only one member of the solar system besides Earth is capable of supporting life. That is Mars. Even Mars, however, appears to be relatively desolate and inhospitable, so that a Martian race would be more occupied with survival than we are on Earth.

On Mars, there exists an excessively slow loss of atmosphere, oxygen and water against which intelligent beings, if they do exist there, may have protected themselves by scientific control of physical conditions. This might have been done, scientists speculate, by the construction of homes and cities underground where the atmospheric pressure would be greater and thus temperature extremes reduced. The other possibilities exist, of course that evolution may have developed a being who can withstand the rigors of the Martian climate, or that the race—if it ever did exist—has perished.

In other words, the existence of intelligent life on Mars, where the rare atmosphere is nearly devoid of oxygen and water and where the nights are much colder than our Arctic winters, is not impossible but is completely unproven.

The possibility of intelligent life also existing on the Planet Venus

is not considered completely unreasonable by astronomers. The atmosphere of Venus apparently consists mostly of carbon dioxide with deep clouds of formaldehyde droplets, and there seems to be little or no water. Yet, scientists concede that living organisms might develop in chemical environments which are strange to us. Venus, however, has two handicaps. Her mass and gravity are nearly as large as the Earth (Mars is smaller) and her cloudy atmosphere would discourage astronomy, hence space travel.

OTHER STAR SYSTEMS

Outside the solar system other stars—22 in number—besides the sun have satellite planets. The sun has nine. One of these, Earth, is ideal for existence of intelligent life. On two others there is possibility of life. Therefore, astronomers believe reasonable the thesis that there could be at least one ideally habitable planet for each of the 22 other eligible stars.

In this line of reasoning the theory is also employed, of necessity, that man represents the average in advancement and development. Therefore, one half the other habitable planets would be behind man in development and the other half ahead. It is also assumed that any visiting race could be expected to be far in advance of man. Thus the chance of space travelers existing at planets attached to neighboring stars is very much greater than the chance of space-travelling Martians. The one can be viewed as almost a certainty (if you accept the thesis that the number of inhabited planets is equal to those that are suitable for life and that intelligent life is not peculiar to earth). Whereas the possibility of space visitors from Mars is very slight indeed.

There is only one stumbling block to a trip from such a distant planet to Earth. But it is a formidable block.

The nearest eligible star is one called Wolf 359. This is eight light years away. Travelling at 1/10th the speed of light—that is 18,000 miles per second—it would take a space ship pilot 80 years for a one-way trip to earth. And this speed is completely beyond the reach of any predicted level of rocket propulsion.

If a process could be created to convert nuclear material into jet energy the time could be cut from 60 to 16 years from Wolf 359 to Earth.

SPACE SHIPS?

The problems involved in the creation of the long idealized "Buck Rogers" type space ship are myriad. While a special purpose rocket can be made as maneuverable as is desired with very high performance, a high performance space ship would be large and unwieldy and could hardly be designed to maneuver frivolously in the earth's atmosphere as the reported discs have done.

Also, such an aircraft could not carry sufficient extra fuel to make repeated descents into the earth's atmosphere.

Scientists say a vertically descending rocket might well appear as a luminous disc to a person standing directly below. Yet observers at a distance would surely be able to identify the rocket as such, and the exhaust should be easy to see.

The possibility that the "saucers" were supported by means of rays or beams was investigated and debunked. By "rays" or "beams" are meant either purely electromagnetic radiation or else radiation which is largely corpuscular like cathode rays, cosmic rays or cyclotron beams.

Any device thus propelled would have to be fundamentally a reaction device. The basic theory of such devices is that a given amount of energy is most efficiently spent if the momentum thrown back or down is large. This means that a large mass should be given a small acceleration—a theorem well understood by helicopter designers.

Beams or rays to the contrary, a small mass is given a very high velocity, and consequently enormous powers—greater than the total world's power capacity—would be needed to support even the smallest object by such means.

Several unorthodox means of supporting or propelling a solid object have been considered, including the fiction writers old stand by, the anti-gravity shield, but all have been found impractical. This, in the opinion of investigating scientists lends credence to the assumption that the unidentified flying objects are supported and propelled by some normal means, or else they are not solids.

Possibilities that the saucers are foreign aircraft have also been considered. But the reported performance of the discs is so superior to anything we have yet approached in this country that it is considered

only an accidental discovery of "a degree of novelty never before achieved" could suffice to explain devices.

SUMMARY

All of the information so far presented in Project "Saucer" on the possible existence of space ships from another planet or of aircraft propelled by an advanced type of atomic power plant have been largely conjecture.

To sum up, no definite conclusive evidence is yet available that would prove or disprove the possibility that a portion of the unidentified objects are real aircraft of unknown or unconventional configuration.

Many sightings by qualified and apparently reliable witnesses have been reported. However, each incident has unsatisfactory features, such as the shortness of time the object was under observation, the great distance from the observer, vagueness of description or photographs, inconsistencies between individual observers, lack of descriptive data, etc.

The obvious explanation for most of the spherical shaped objects reported, as already mentioned, is that they are meteorological or similar type balloons. This, however, does not explain reports that they travel at high speed or maneuver rapidly. But "Saucer" men point out that the movement could be explained away as an optical illusion or actual acceleration of the balloon caused by a gas leak and later exaggerated by observers.

The most reasonable explanation for the reported "balls of light" is that they were suspended from balloons or some other means of support not visible at night, and that the violent maneuvers sometimes reported in these cases were due to optical illusion.

There are scores of possible explanations for the scores of different type sightings reported. Many of the aerial phenomena have been positively identified. However, the correct tagging of the remaining percentage is still the job of Project "Saucer."

The "saucers" are not a joke. Neither are they a cause for alarm to the population. Many of the incidents already have answers. Meteors. Balloons. Falling stars. Birds in flight. Testing devices, etc. Some of them still end in question marks.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The entire report was issued with several minor additions as a Memorandum to the Press just two days later on April 27, 1949. It can be obtained by writing the Office of Public Information, Department of Defense, OPI, Washington, and asking for Memo to the Press No. M26-49.

(Copy of letter to George Beach, undated.)

Dear George:

Did you ever read such an amazing document as the one released last week by the Air Force. You've noted that about the only thing added to the copy I sent you was some hearty back-slapping which described the work of our organization. Kee-rist! Anyhow, the report is out and the public knows everything we know. Most important, it knows that there is a possibility that presently we may be entertaining visitors (or burglars) from some other planet. What will Emily Post recommend, I wonder.

This uncertainty is driving me batty. Are any of the saucers from space? I've taken a personal poll of most of the boys working on this job. I guess we're just as confused as the public. The count is fifty-fifty. Nobody knows. Nobody! By God, I'm going to find out. I don't know how but I'm going to find out if it takes the rest of my life. Well, I hear the President has shown enough interest in my sky-sweeper patrol to force the Air Forces hand. Squadrons may be set up equipped with camera guns, if Killian doesn't block it. It's about time.

(Letter to Mrs. Vernon Piper.)

Darling:

It won't be much longer. Your last letter drove me almost crazy. We are so close to the end of this mad comedy. Hang onto our love a little longer. I'd quit this minute if I could, but I can't, dear. I had a dream about Jimmy last night. I was flying a plane and he came alongside in a curious looking ship, something I'd never seen before. He kept pointing to where the sun was setting. Odd sort of dream for me to have, wasn't it? Hang on, sweetheart. We're on the home stretch. With all my love.

(Memorandum to Colonel Killian, July 23, 1949.)

Subject: Re-assignment.

1. It is understood that, Air Force orders have been issued activating sky-sweeper patrol squadrons to assist in the work of Project Saucer.

2. I have worked on Project Saucer since its inception. I am a pilot with combat and command rating.

3. My experience with this undertaking leads me to believe that I could be most useful in carrying out the project mission as a squadron leader or executive officer.

4. This requests assignment to a sky-sweeper squadron, preferably one allocated to the West Coast.

(Letter to George Beach, undated.)

Dear George:

Am I going nuts? Listen to my tale and send a psychiatrist by return mail. I stopped at the Blue Goose Inn the other night for a drink. It was about ten o'clock. I had a quick one and a guy at the bar said "Have another." I was lonesome so I agreed. We got into a conversation. He offered to drive me home and I let him. That was crazy, but it got crazier later. I'll try to tell it as it happened.

He drove onto a dead end road where the houses were thin and stopped. I said, "What's the idea?"

"We've wanted to talk to you for a long time," he answered. Get that "we."

"We've been watching you get the runaround here and in Washington for over a year," he said. "You are a scientist and you don't like it."

I said, "Wait a minute. Who're you talking for?"

"We are many people and many nations," he answered.

"Russia?"

"Let me answer it this way," he said. "If the 'saucers' were from Russia, there would be no need for me to be here. If they were a hoax, I'd be wasting my time."

"Then you think they are genuine. Space ships, huh?"

"I am here," he said. "We do not want any confirmation of the fact that your 'saucers' are from other planets. Nor do your leaders in Washington."

"You can't stop the truth. There will be photographs one of these days."

"We stopped the pictures carried by our friend, Zimmerman."

"You killed him for that, didn't you." I was beginning to see red.

He laughed. "Did you see the body in the phone booth. No, you did not! That was not Zimmerman. That was a drunk we found in an alley. Zimmerman's papers were in his pocket. He is a valuable man. And sensible. We've talked to him and he's accepted our offer. He'll never want money or comfort or er . . . women, as long as he works with us. The Urals are very healthy . . ."

"Are you saying Jimmy sold out?" I didn't believe it.

"Dig up the body," he said. "Take a look. Jimmy is alive and happy. He is very smart. He thought that you might be interested in the same arrangement."

I was amazed by his intensity, by the cock-sureness of his attitude. The accent puzzled me and my mind went to work on his origin. He had mentioned Urals. His next remark left no doubt.

"My people are superstitious and stupid. Aren't all masses? Our leaders can maintain their power as long as the people are frightened. Right now, they fear the United States. That is good. They work endlessly preparing for the war they have been promised. What if it is suddenly learned that other planets are also inhabited, that visitors have already arrived on this earth? My people would think the end of the world was come and they would quit their work. In your country, it is the same. Your politicians say you must defend yourself against Russia. More planes, more atom bombs, more billions. What if men from Mars visited you? What of your preparations? They are empty! If Marsmen can conquer space, they can conquer anything. The futility is obvious."

He looked me in the eye and his brows drew together. "I shall be glad for your answer immediately," he said.

"My answer is no," I said, opening the door.

"Wait," he told me. "You are a man of sense. Do not refuse. It would be disastrous for you."

I got out of the car and walked home through the darkness, wondering if I was drunk on Guinness' whisky. I've got to think some more about this trick, George. He was frank enough. Russia thinks

the saucers are authentic and doesn't want them confirmed. I understand that. But neither does Washington. Have they got the same fears for the same reasons? Our interview ended with a threat, didn't it? Well, I can take care of myself. Goodnight, my head is bursting.

(Clipping from a Dayton newspaper, undated.)

Air Force employee, Vernon Piper, found near death on highway. Picnickers walking along Mulberry Road north of Columbus, yesterday, discovered the mangled body. It is understood that he had been active in investigating the phenomenon of flying saucers. Colonel Timothy Killian, commanding officer of Piper's unit, said in reply to questions, "Piper was a good man but he held strong and unbalanced opinions which he expressed freely. As a result, he made a lot of enemies. I'm afraid he was a natural-born trouble-maker."

Piper was taken to Wright Field Hospital where he is reported in critical condition. He had evidently taken a terrific beating from parties unknown. Up to press time, he had not regained consciousness.

(Letter from Colonel Killian, undated.)

Dear Piper:

I write this personal note to spare you an official report. Your accident was regrettable and has caused us considerable embarrassment with those members of Congress who know the facts. We made a thorough investigation. It was not like you, Piper, to get drunk while on duty. It is obvious, however, that you did so and were beaten up by three men with whom you picked a quarrel. Several witnesses saw you leave the Blue Goose bar.

Under the circumstances, your usefulness to Project Saucer is finished. As a matter of fact, I have received private word from Washington that our entire undertaking will soon be liquidated. The skysweep program has already been scrubbed, to my certain knowledge. In my opinion it was a mistake for the Air Force ever to get involved in any such Buck Rogers program.

I don't know what you contemplate as your future career, but I know you have strong beliefs regarding flying saucers. I hope you will think twice before expressing those beliefs publicly. No good can come of having crackpot ideas supported by a pilot and physicist of your stand-

ing. You've never seen a flying saucer, so you can't be certain. Why not forget the whole thing until you're an eye-witness yourself.

But that can never happen, of course. Not unless you start drinking again. Yours truly . . .

(Copy of letter to George Beach, March 25, 1950.)

Dear George:

Your letters have meant a lot those last few months. A hospital isn't a cheerful place. Now I'm in good shape again. But what for? You know about Mary. You know about the Saucer Project, too. The Air Force has dropped it like a hot potato. Some politicians must have put the heat on Symington to save money. Chasing space ships costs money. If they'd only let some of us cruise around in jets, we'd have an answer.

By the way, rumor has it that I got beat up after getting drunk on duty. You know me too well to swallow that crap but I want you to know what happened. I went to the Blue Goose bar, a handy place for a drink. Remember my writing about the big guy with the accent who took me for a drive one night and talked crazy about me and the Urals. He was there. I had one drink and started to phone the FBI. Then I passed out. The drink must have been loaded. Maybe they beat me up afterwards. Or ran over me with a truck. I don't think they intended to leave me alive.

Well, I've fooled them. What next? No job, no girl, no future. Mary's attitude stumps me. She didn't write to the hospital once. Guess I'm at the end of my tether.

I'm still bothered by the damnedest dreams. They started right after Zimmy, my old roommate, got killed. I'll dream I'm flying and he'll come along and beckon me to follow him. He always points to where the sun is setting. Damnedest thing to watch him bank away and then turn his head to see if I'm following. I've got a powerful feeling that he means for me to go out West. Well, California is warm and sunny. I need plenty of that stuff.

They've washed out the saucer project, but I'm not through. I've done a lot of thinking these last several months. Maybe I'll be lucky enough to meet up with flying saucer myself. Dammit, I've got to, George. I'll never rest until I know the truth. This thing has got under my skin. I can't rest now. So little time, so much to do.

(Letter to Mrs. Mary Piper, March 16, 1950.)

Darling Mary:

No visit when I needed you more than any medicine in the world. No mail when just one letter would have healed my busted bones. Now the paper tells me why. You had to go through with it, didn't you? The paragraph merely says "Society girl Mary Piper received her divorce from Major Vernon Piper yesterday in Caliente, Mexico." Perhaps it's just as well. Your life has always been devoted to things as they are: houses and cars and comfy, satisfied people of your own set. My interests are in things as they ought to be. Sure that's impractical, but my conscience is clear. Most of all, I still want to see for myself whether or not space ships really exist.

My flight tonight may clear up something. I've got a strong feeling about tonight. It's been growing stronger through the weeks. That's why I came to California. I keep dreaming about Jimmy, the boy I roomed with in Dayton. Tonight, I've wangled a plane from a friend named Paul Mantz, the speed pilot, who is the only guy I've met who agrees that flying saucers might come from Mars. I wish the Air Force had just one man like him. Anyhow, he's loaning me his plane and I'm going on a flight of my own. My hunch is powerful that I'll learn something. Whatever happens, I hope you will be happy. I'll always love you.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Vernon Piper took Paul Mantz' P-51 off the runway at eleven o'clock on the night of June 16, 1950 and climbed straight out over the Pacific. He made radio contact with March Field a little later and said the plane was okay and visibility unlimited. And then Piper disappeared. That is all that's known of his amazing adventure except what Adam Jones, my friend, added when he tore a page from his personal diary, the page for the day following the take-off, March 17, 1950, and appended it to this documentation.

(From the diary of Adam Jones, March 17, 1950.)

My senses are reeling. Within the past twenty-four hours, an incredible event has occurred. Last night I was working in my study well after midnight. My radio was tuned softly to WCBS, and the music was some milkman's matinee. Suddenly it faded and I heard a voice.

It was quite excited, saying, "We interrupt this program to bring you what is either an amazing hoax or the most dramatic broadcast in history. Our Los Angeles station has established radio contact with a plane piloted by Major Vernon Piper who is making a flying saucer search over the Pacific Ocean along the California Coast. Major Piper recently left a military hospital where he recovered from a mysterious attempt on his life. He had been investigating flying saucer phenomena for almost two years."

Hearing Vernon's name raised goose pimples on my skin. I knew him as well as my own brother. We were raised together. But we had not seen each other for years. The voice droned on. . . . "Before Piper's take-off tonight, he told airport attendants that something had directed him to make this particular flight. Wait! They've made contact with him again." The voice got slightly hysterical. "Come in, Piper. Come in, Major Piper . . ."

I heard Vernon's voice then . . . distant and distorted with static but as calm as if he were sitting behind a desk—my memory is quite clear on this—and he was saying, "It's straight ahead and above me about 1,000 feet. Let me tell you what it looks like. I'd say it's the size of a small dirigible, whale-shape. Its lighting is most remarkable. It glows like a monster firefly. The only movement I can see comes from the tail which has a sort of beat. The tail ends in what seem to be flames. Yes! It turned to the right just now and its flaming tail definitely caused the turn, I can close up now for a better look. Yes! I'm gaining. Closer. The space ship is now about two hundred yards away. We are flying parallel. This is amazing. I can see right through it! The heat is terrific. But I can see through it. There is no frame but rather the whole mass is like a transparent, vivid stain in the atmosphere. Something else! Inside the stain I see shapes which move through it with amazing rapidity. Metallic figures. They turn bright and dull in turn. Could they be the equivalent of men from some other plane? I'm close enough to see them gleam and fade . . . gleam and fade. It's a pattern like code. Perhaps they are trying to signal. Maybe that's the way they talk. But this proves it, doesn't it? Can you hear me? Is my voice getting through? It must get through. This is what the world must know. We are not alone in the universe. Other planets have men, too. We must learn to live with them.

"The plane is acting up. I feel a heavy pull toward the space ship. We seem to be in a gravity field that counteracts the earth. We're sliding sideways toward the whale. It's like a magnet. Those metal figures are flashing like mad. I can't get the ship out of this sideslip. The heat . . . the heat. . . ."

My memory stops there. It was an amazing broadcast. I have a wire recorder attached to my radio and when Piper came on I connected it. I was still puzzling, when the doorbell rang. It was a Western Union messenger, a hulk of a man who handed me a yellow telegram. I asked him if he could deliver a package to an all-night secretarial service. "Glad to," he said, his voice deep and oddly accented. I gave him the spool of wire from the wire recorder. "Tell them I want that copied and returned first thing in the morning." He left without a word.

These final words are added in embarrassment and confusion, but they are part of the amazing record. I shall not spare myself. By noon the following day when I had not received my transcript, I telephoned. They had not received the spool of wire. I called Western Union. They protested that they had delivered no telegram to me the night before and I must confess that I am unable to find such a paper among my documents. Finally, I recalled that CBS makes recordings of all its programs. They would have a copy. I telephoned a friend.

"What broadcast?" he asked.

"On WCBS about ten minutes after two this morning."

"Wait a minute," he said.

When he came back, he said, "Are you crazy, Adams? WCBS wasn't even on the air at two o'clock this morning."

Writing Class

A class in fantasy writing was being instructed. The professor said, "I want you to learn how to get various other elements into your stories. Write me a theme immediately using the subjects of religion, royalty, and mystery."

The writers bent over their pencils. One small fellow wrote a few words and delivered his paper to the desk. It was perfect. It said:

"Jesus Christ! The queen is pregnant. Who done it?"

Do You Know A Haunted House?

We have volunteered to help a motion picture company find the best haunted house in America. Or the worst. They want to make a movie in the eeriest, creepiest ghost-ridden mansion on this continent. For our part, FANTASY STORIES wants to publish the stories behind our famous haunted houses.

So we seek your help. Is there a haunted house in your town or county? What is its story? What grisly event led to its being haunted? Who have the ghosts bewitched? Has any living person seen those spirits with his own eyes?

If you can help, write us. Name the house and its location. Give full facts so we can judge their importance. You need not be a writer yourself; but tell us every detail you know. We will rewrite them for publication.

For each published story of a haunted house adapted from the report of any reader, we will pay \$50.00 plus a bonus of \$1,000 if that story is chosen as the basis of a theatrical motion picture. This is not a contest. Send us your suggestions, but be certain that the house you name is really haunted.

Write to Haunted House Editor, FANTASY STORIES, 420 Lexington Ave., New York City.
THE EDITOR

He was a strange and horrifying man and his kinship with the denizens of Reelfoot Lake gave him a weird power in life and death

Blood-Brother of the Swamp Cats

By Irvin S. Cobb

It goes past the powers of my pen to try to describe Reelfoot Lake for you so that you, reading this, will get the picture of it in your mind as I have it in mind.

For Reelfoot Lake is like no other lake that I know anything about. It is an afterthought of Creation.

The rest of this continent was made and had dried in the sun for thousands of years—millions of years, for all I know—before Reelfoot came to be. It's the newest big thing in nature on this hemisphere, probably, for it was formed by the great earthquake of 1811.

That earthquake of 1811 surely altered the face of the earth on the then far frontier of this country.

It changed the course of rivers, it converted hills into what are now the sunk lands of three states, and it turned the solid ground to jelly and made it roll in waves like the sea.

And in the midst of the retching of the land and the vomiting of the waters it depressed to varying depths a section of the earth crust sixty miles long, taking it down—trees, hills, hollows, and all; and a crack broke through to the Mississippi River so that for three days the river ran up stream, filling the hole.

The result was the largest lake south of the Ohio, lying mostly in Tennessee, but extending up across what is now the Kentucky line, and taking its name from a fancied resemblance in its outline to the splay, reeled foot of a cornfield negro. Nigger-wool Swamp, not so far away, may have got its name from the same man who christened Reelfoot; at least so it sounds.

Reelfoot, is, and has always been, a lake of mystery.

In places it is all but bottomless. Other places the skeletons of the

cypress-trees that went down when the earth sank, still stand upright so that if the sun shines from the right quarter, and the water is less muddy than common, a man, peering face downward into its depths, sees, or thinks he sees, down below him the bare top-limbs upstretching like drowned men's fingers, all coated with the mud of years and bandaged with pennons of the green lake slime.

In still other places the lake is shallow for long stretches, no deeper than breast high to a man, but dangerous because of the weed growths and the sunken drifts which entangle a swimmer's limbs. Its banks are mainly mud, its waters are muddied, too, being a rich coffee color in the spring and a copperish yellow in the summer, and the trees along its shore are mud colored clear up their lower limbs after the spring floods, when the dried sediment covers their trunks with a thick, scrofulous-looking coat.

There are stretches of unbroken woodland around it, and slashes where the cypress knees rise countlessly like headstones for the dead snags that rot in the soft ooze.

There are dead-endings with the lowland corn growing high and rank below and the bleached, fire-girdled trees rising above, barren of leaf and limb.

There are long, dismal flats where in the spring the clotted frog-spawn cling like patches of white mucus among the weed-stalks, and at night the turtles crawl out to lay clutches of perfectly round, white eggs with tough, rubbery shells in the sand.

There are bayous leading off to nowhere, and sloughs that wind aimlessly, like great, blind worms, to finally join the big river that rolls a few miles to the westward.

So Reelfoot lies there, flat in the bottoms, freezing lightly in the winter, steaming torridly in the summer, swollen in the spring when the woods have turned a vivid green and the buffalo-gnats by the million and the billion fill the flooded hollows with their pestilential buzzing, and in the fall, ringed about gloriously with all the colors which the first frost brings—gold of hickory, yellow-russet of sycamore, red of dogwood and ash, and purple-black of sweet-gum.

But the Reelfoot country has its uses. It is the best game and fish country, natural or artificial, that is left in the South today.

In their appointed seasons the duck and the geese flock in, and even semi-tropical birds, like the brown pelican and the Florida snake-bird, have been known to come there to nest.

Pigs, gone back to wildness, range the ridges, each razor-backed drove captained by a gaunt, savage, slab-sided old boar. By night the bullfrogs, inconceivably big and tremendously vocal, bellow under the banks.

It is a wonderful place for fish—bass and crappie, and perch, and the snouted buffalo fish.

How these edible sorts live to spawn, and how their spawn in turn live to spawn again is a marvel, seeing how many of the big fish-eating cannibal-fish there are in Reelfoot.

Here, bigger than anywhere else, you find the garfish, all bones and appetite and horny plates, with a snout like an alligator, the nearest link, naturalists say, between the animal life of today and the animal life of the Reptilian Period.

The shovel-nose cat, really a deformed kind of fresh-water sturgeon, with a great fan-shaped membranous plate jutting out from his nose like a bowsprit, jumps all day in the quiet places with mighty splashing sounds, as though a horse had fallen into the water.

On every stranded log the huge snapping turtles lie on sunny days in groups of four and six, baking their shells black in the sun, with their little snaky heads raised watchfully, ready to slip noiselessly off at the first sound of oars grating in the row-locks. But the biggest of them all are the catfish!

These are monstrous creatures, these catfish of Reelfoot—scaleless, slick things, with corpsy, dead eyes and poisonous fins, like javelins, and huge whiskers dangling from the sides of their cavernous heads.

Six and seven feet long they grow to be, and weigh 200 pounds or more, and they have mouths wide enough to take in a man's foot or a man's fist, and strong enough to break any hook save the strongest, and greedy enough to eat anything, living or dead or putrid, that the horny jaws can master.

Oh, but they are wicked things, and they tell wicked tales of them down there. They call them man-eaters, and compare them, in certain of their habits, to sharks.

Fishhead was of a piece with this setting.

He fitted into it as an acorn fits its cup. All his life he had lived on Reelfoot, always in the one place, at the mouth of a certain slough.

He had been born there, of a negro father and a half-breed Indian mother, both of them now dead, and the story was that before his birth his mother was frightened by one of the big fish, so that the child came into the world most hideously marked.

Anyhow, Fishhead was a human monstrosity, the veritable embodiment of nightmare!

He had the body of a man—a short-stocky, sinewy body—but his face was as near to being the face of a great fish as any face could be and yet retain some trace of human aspect.

His skull sloped back so abruptly that he could hardly be said to have a forehead at all; his chin slanted off right into nothing. His eyes were small and round with shallow, glazed, pale-yellow pupils, and they were set wide apart in his head, and they were unwinking and staring, like a fish's eyes.

His nose was no more than a pair of tiny slits in the middle of the yellow mask. His mouth was the worst of all. It was the awful mouth of a catfish, lipless and almost inconceivably wide, stretching from side to side.

Also when Fishhead became a man grown his likeness to a fish increased, for the hair upon his face grew out into two tightly kinked slender pendants that drooped down either side of the mouth like the beards of a fish!

If he had any other name than Fishhead, none excepting he knew it. As Fishhead he was known, and as Fishhead he answered. Because he knew the waters and the woods of Reelfoot better than any other man there, he was valued as a guide by the city men who came every year to hunt or fish; but there were few such jobs that Fishhead would take.

Mainly he kept to himself, tending his corn-patch, netting the lake, trapping a little, and in season pot hunting for the city markets. His neighbors, ague-bitten whites and malaria-proof negroes alike, left him to himself.

Indeed, for the most part they had a superstitious fear of him. So he lived alone, with no kith nor kin, nor even a friend, shunning his kind and shunned by them.

His cabin stood just below the State line, where Mud Slough runs into

the lake. It was a shack of logs, the only human habitation for four miles up or down.

Behind it the thick timber came shouldering right up to the edge of Fishhead's small truck patch, enclosing it in thick shade except when the sun stood just overhead.

He cooked his food in a primitive fashion, outdoors, over a hole in the soggy earth or upon the rusted red ruin of an old cookstove, and he drank the saffron water of the lake out of a dipper made of a gourd, faring and fending for himself, a master hand at skiff and net, competent with duck-gun and fishspear, yet a creature of affliction and loneliness, part savage, almost amphibious, set apart from his fellows, silent and suspicious.

In front of his cabin jutted out a long fallen cottonwood trunk, lying half in and half out of the water, its top side burnt by the sun and worn by the friction of Fishhead's bare feet until it showed countless patterns of tiny scrolled lines, its underside black and rotted, and lapped at unceasingly by little waves like tiny licking tongues.

Its farther end reached deep water. And it was a part of Fishhead, for no matter how far his fishing and trapping might take him in the daytime, sunset would find him back there, his boat drawn up on the bank, and he on the other end of this log.

From a distance men had seen him there many times, sometimes squatted motionless as the big turtles that would crawl upon its dipping tip in his absence, sometimes erect and motionless like a creek crane, his misshapen yellow form outlined against the yellow sun, the yellow water, the yellow banks—all of them yellow together.

If the Reelfooter's shunned Fishhead by day they feared him by night and avoided him as a plague, dreading even the chance of a casual meeting. For there were ugly stories about Fishhead—stories which all the negroes and some of the whites believed.

They said that a cry which had been heard just before dusk and just after, skittering across the darkened waters, was his calling cry to the big catfish, and at his bidding they came trooping in, and that in their company he swam in the lake on moonlight nights, sporting with them, diving with them, even feeding with them on what manner of unclean things.

The cry had been heard many times, that much was certain, and it

was certain also that the big fish were noticeably thick at the mouth of Fishhead's slough. No native Reelfooter, white or black, would willingly wet a leg or an arm there.

Here Fishhead had lived, and here he was going to die. The Baxters were going to kill him, and this day in late summer was to be the time of the killing.

The two Baxters—Jake and Joel—were coming in their dugout to do it!

This murder had been a long time in the making. The Baxters had to brew their hate over a slow fire for months before it reached the pitch of action.

They were poor whites, poor in everything, repute, and worldly goods, and standing—a pair of fever-ridden squatters who lived on whiskey and tobacco when they could get it, and on fish and corn-bread when they couldn't.

The feud itself was of months' standing.

Meeting Fishhead one day in the spring on the spindly scaffolding of the skiff landing at Walnut Log, and being themselves far overtaken in liquor and vainglorious with a bogus alcoholic substitute for courage, the brothers had accused him, wantonly and without proof, of running their trot-line and stripping it of the hooked catch—an unforgivable sin among the water dwellers and the shanty boaters of the South.

Seeing that he bore this accusation in silence, only eyeing them steadfastly, they had been emboldened then to slap his face, whereupon he turned and gave them both the beating of their lives—bloodying their noses and bruising their lips with hard blows against their front teeth, and finally leaving them, mauled and prone, in the dirt.

Moreover, in the onlookers a sense of the everlasting fitness of things had triumphed over race prejudice and allowed them—two freeborn, sovereign whites—to be licked by a nigger! Therefore they were going to get the nigger!

The whole thing had been planned out amply. They were going to kill him on his log at sundown. There would be no witnesses to see it, no retribution to follow after it. The very ease of the undertaking made them forget even their inborn fear of the place of Fishhead's habitation.

For more than an hour they had been coming from their shack across a deeply indented arm of the lake.

Their dugout, fashioned by fire and adz and draw-knife from the bole of a gum-tree, moved through the water as noiselessly as a swimming mallard, leaving behind it a long, wavy trail on the stilled waters.

Jake, the better oarsman, sat flat in the stern of the round bottomed craft, paddling with quick, splashless strokes. Joel, the better shot, was squatted forward. There was a heavy, rusted duckgun between his knees.

Though their spying upon the victim had made them certain sure he would not be about the shore for hours, a doubled sense of caution led them to hug closely the weedy banks. They slid along the shore like shadows, moving so swiftly and in such silence that the watchful mud turtles barely turned their snaky heads as they passed.

So, a full hour before the time, they came slipping around the mouth of the slough and made for a natural ambushade which the mixed-breed had left within a stone's jerk of his cabin to his own undoing.

Where the slough's flow joined deeper water a partly uprooted tree was stretched, prone from shore, at the top still thick and green with leaves that drew nourishment from the earth in which the half uncovered roots yet held, and twined about with an exuberance of trumpet vines and wild fox-grapes. All about was a huddle of drift—last year's cornstalks, shreddy strips of bark, chunks of rotted weed, all the ruffle and dunnage of a quiet eddy.

Straight into this green clump glided the dugout and swung, broadside on, against the protecting trunk of the tree, hidden from the inner side by the intervening curtains of rank growth, just as the Baxters had intended it should be hidden, when days before in their scouting they marked this masked place of waiting and included it, then and there, in the scope of their plans.

There had been no hitch or mishap. No one had been abroad in the late afternoon to mark their movements—and in a little while Fishhead ought to be due. Jake's woodman's eye followed the downward swing of the sun speculatively.

The shadows, thrown shoreward, lengthened and slithered on the small ripples. The small noises of the day died out; the small noises of the coming night began to multiply.

The green bodied flies went away and big mosquitoes, with speckled gray legs, came to take the place of the flies.

The sleepy lake sucked at the mud banks with small mouthing sounds, as though it found the taste of the raw mud agreeable. A monster crawfish, big as a chicken lobster, crawled out of the top of his dried mud chimney and perched himself there, an armored sentinel on the watchtower.

Bull bats began to flutter back and forth, above the tops of the trees. A pudgy muskrat, swimming with head up, was moved to sidle off briskly as he met a cotton-mouth moccasin snake, so fat and swollen with summer poison that it looked almost like a legless lizard as it moved along the surface of the water in a series of slow torpid *s's*. Directly above the head of either of the waiting assassins a compact little swarm of midges hung, holding to a sort of kite-shaped formation.

A little more time passed and Fishhead came out of the woods at the back, walking swiftly, with a sack over his shoulder.

For a few seconds his deformities showed in the clearing, then the black inside of the cabin swallowed him up.

By now the sun was almost down. Only the red hub of it showed above the timber line across the lake, and the shadows lay inland a long way. Out beyond, the big cats were stirring, and the great smacking sounds as their twisting bodies leaped clear and fell back in the water, came shoreward in a chorus.

But the two brothers, in their green covert, gave heed to nothing except the one thing upon which their hearts were set and their nerves tensed. Joel gently shoved his gun-barrels across the log, cuddling the stock to his shoulder and slipping two fingers caressingly back and forth upon the triggers. Jake held the narrow dugout steady by a grip upon a fox-grape tendril.

A little wait and then the finish came!

Fishhead emerged from the cabin door and came down the footpath to the water and out upon the water on his log.

He was barefooted and bareheaded, his cotton shirt open down the front to show his yellow neck and breast, his dungaree trousers held about his waist by a twisted tow string.

His broad splay feet, with the prehensile toes outspread, gripped the polished curve of the log as he moved along its swaying, dipping surface,

until he came to its outer end, and stood there erect, his chest filling, his chinless face lifted up, and something of mastership and dominion in his poise.

And then—his eye caught what another's eyes might have missed—the round, twin ends of the gun barrels, the fixed gleam of Joel's eyes, aimed at him through the green tracery!

In that swift passage of time, too swift almost to be measured by seconds, realization flashed all through him, and he threw his head still higher and opened wide his shapeless trap of a mouth, and out across the lake he sent skittering and rolling his cry.

And in his cry was the laugh of a loon, and the croaking bellow of a frog, and the bay of a hound, all the compounded night noises of the lake. And in it, too, was a farewell, and a defiance, and an appeal!

The heavy roar of the duck gun came!

At twenty yards the double charge tore the throat out of him. He came down, face forward, upon the log and clung there, his trunk twisting distortedly, his legs twitching and kicking like the legs of a speared frog; his shoulders hunching and lifting spasmodically as the life ran out of him all in one swift coursing flow.

His head canted up between the heaving shoulders, his eyes looked full on the staring face of his murderer, and then the blood came out of his mouth, and Fishhead, in death still as much fish as man, slid, flopping, head first, off the end of the log, and sank, face downward slowly, his limbs all extended.

One after another a string of big bubbles came up to burst in the middle of a widening reddish stain on the coffee-colored water.

The brothers watched this, held by the horror of the thing they had done, and the cranky dugout, having been tipped far over by the recoil of the gun, took water steadily across its gunwale; and now there was a sudden stroke from below upon its careening bottom and it went over and they were in the lake.

But shore was only twenty feet away, the trunk of the uprooted tree only five. Joel, still holding fast to his shot gun, made for the log, gaining it with one stroke. He threw his free arm over it and clung there, treading water, as he shook his eyes free.

Something gripped him—some great, sinewy, unseen thing gripped him fast by the thigh, crushing down on his flesh!

He uttered no cry, but his eyes popped out, and his mouth set in a square shape of agony, and his fingers gripped into the bark of the tree like grapples. He was pulled down and down, by steady jerks, not rapidly but steadily, so steadily, and as he went his fingernails tore four little white strips in the tree-bark. His mouth went under, next his popping eyes, then his erect hair, and finally his clawing, clutching hand, and that was the end of him.

Jake's fate was harder still, for he lived longer, long enough to see Joel's finish. He saw it through the water that ran down his face, and with a great surge of his whole body, he literally flung himself across the log and jerked his legs up high into the air to save them. He flung himself too far, though, for his face and chest hit the water on the far side.

And out of this water rose the head of a great fish, with the lake slime of years on its flat, black head, its whiskers bristling, its corpsy eyes alight. Its horny jaws closed and clamped in the front of Jake's shirt. His hand struck out wildly and was speared on a poisoned fin, and, unlike Joel, he went from sight with a great yell, and a whirling and churning of the water that made the cornstalks circle on the edges of a small whirlpool.

But the whirlpool soon thinned away into widening rings of ripples, and the cornstalks quit circling and became still again, and only the multiplying night noises sounded about the mouth of the slough.

The bodies of all three came ashore on the same day near the same place. Except for the gaping gunshot wound where the neck met the chest, Fishhead's body was unmarked.

But the bodies of the two Baxters were so marred and mauled that the Reelfooters buried them together on the bank without ever knowing which might be Jake's and which might be Joel's.

Small Ghost Talk

"How did you get here?"

"I'll tell you by reciting a poem."

"Go ahead."

"I found a skunk and took it to bed. Now it's alive and I'm all dead."

Here is rank and rotten jungle. Here's a woman bad as sin. And a little guy who stands for anything but being made a sucker

Her Love was Jungle Gold

By Theodore Roscoe

Yellow and green. Black and red. It takes colors to waken memory. Recollection would be stirred by sound or smell. But the sounds—the pulsing throb of devil drums beating across the gloom, the hiss of a python slipping through tall spear grass, the plop of a crocodile dropping into murky water—and that putrid stench of spoiling vegetation (and humanity)—could be approximated nowhere else on earth.

It remains for a sight of yellow against green, red against black, to carry me once again to that foul coast which lies, a festering sore, on the southeast edge of Africa.

Yellow and green for the jungle rotting under torrid skies, the sluggish river slinking among fat trees, the bilious fever swamps, the perverted daylight leaking through screens of lush foliage. Red and black for the cotton-thick jungle night pricked by native camp fires, the flare of resin torches alarming the hot dark, or the glow of reflected flame gleaming in sweat-wet ebony Negroid cheeks.

Evil colors, those—the hues of that hell which lies below the sick Zambezi River in Portuguese East Africa, Mozambique. Those colors paint the background of this story. But then there was another color. *Gold!* The gold that lured Brander Haggot and Enoch Rice and the woman. The gold that sent one of them to an ugly death. There are strange and terrible ways of dying in Mozambique. This was one of the strangest and most terrible. Here is the story; and a queer, grim story it is . . .

Funny how you will reëncounter people to prove the world is a small place, after all. I met Enoch Rice, and saw his wife and Brander Haggot in Singapore two years before I started running the Asian

Witch up Mozambique Channel, two million miles away.

Rice was a dentist, and a good one. If a chap was unfortunate enough to be in Singapore and have an aching molar at the same time, he took popular advice and hunted out the little white shop on Prince Edward's Lane.

In those days it was mighty hard to find a good dentist east of the Suez Canal; and the gray little man on Prince Edward's Lane in Singapore had the reputation of a wizard. He must have been making a pile of money. Ship captains, wealthy natives, government officials and their discontented wives crowded his office. I cruised into Singapore with a bad wisdom tooth, and the mate of the Indo-China packet sent me to Rice. He did not even flaunt the title of D.D.S.

He should have won a knighthood for his faultless and painless technique, but he was just the ordinary sort of man who melts in a crowd or a group of four. Meek blue eyes, chestnut hair, expressionless mouth in a face made pallid by too much tropics, quinine and curry powder.

He might have been twenty-eight or thirty-eight. A trifle stoop shouldered; given to leanness, agile hands, and positive genius at repairing one's faulty dental equipment.

I remember thinking that somewhere back in his family an ancestor might have been "touched with the tar brush." Perhaps it was the darkness of his fingernails which implied a trace of Eurasian blood. Certainly he was mild, reserved and unobtrusive in the best English tradition. As he was the kind one would never speculate about, afterwards, I recalled him chiefly for his nice extraction of my tooth. Later, I was to remember him well enough!

Brander Haggot entered Rice's office while I was in the chair. Haggot was some sort of agent for the old Peninsular and Oriental, and Rice's friend. He was not the man to be lost in a group of four or a crowd of four hundred. He was muscle slabbed and big, and endowed with the confidence that accompanies size and two hundred pounds. I remembered him for his magnificent chest and the laugh that boomed out of it, the massive automatic that could be seen nestling in the shoulder holster under his drill jacket, and his face.

It was a large face under a blowzy shock of sandy hair, and it might have been handsome but for the sharp gleam of the narrow eyes and

the startling glitter of the four upper front teeth which were gold.

It is a sardonic enough thing to realize that Enoch Rice had made those same gold teeth!

The following afternoon I returned to Rice's dental parlor for a jaw treatment. A little early, my call was unexpected. The outer office was deserted, and the native attendant nowhere to be seen. But something was going on in the inner room; something mighty important, by the sound of things.

Unnoticed, I lounged in a chair near the outer door; picked up a frayed copy of *Punch* and tried to read. The rattan screen, dropped across the door to the inner office, stirred open at a breath of warm wind. I saw a woman's face. I heard a basso voice utter the magic word: "Gold!"

"Gold!" came the voice. Brander Haggot's voice. "Enough to make us millionaires, I tell you. Listen to me, Enoch Rice! The man who stakes a claim in there will make a king's fortune. This native who brought me the report wouldn't lie. He wouldn't dare. Vasco Joao had started working the stuff before he died. Placer mining. There's his letter, and there's the dust to prove it. The Portuguese knew what he was about. For Lord's sake, Enoch, don't throw down the chance of a lifetime!"

Then came a cautious rejoinder: "But it's so blasted far away, Brander! A devilish place to get to."

"So's the end of any rainbow! Think, man—a couple of millions in gold dust lying around for the finding. May take us time, that's so. But you got the money to finance it. You could get the money to finance it. You could buy six outfits, and you know it. Come in with me, fellow, or you'll always regret it. Will you put up the funds? Come! We can't haggle all day. Will you do it?"

"But my wife? Look here, Lyda; you've always hated the tropics like the devil. That place will be worse. You—"

The woman's laugh was low, carrying a note of excitement. "Oh, Enoch, don't be a fool. Brander's giving us the chance. We *must* go with him. I've told you fifty times already I'd like it. Go, Enoch. Go!"

Circe must have owned a voice like that. It was a voice conjured to make of a man an obedient plaything. Low and tense and throaty, at once a command and a wheedle, it could have started a man across

a lake of fire to find a bauble, could have made a fool of a philosopher.

Then Brander Haggot's laugh was a taunt. "Hang it, Rice, you've got a fortune to gain and damned little to lose. I know you can put up the money without battin' an eyelash. Your wife is game. You hear what she says. Take her word for it, old boy, an' mine, too. Will you do it?"

Then Rice's murmur, an excited exclamation from the woman and a boomy guffaw from Haggot:

"That's the stuff. Knew you wouldn't throw down an ol' friend an' the chance of your life. Great! We'll get under way at once. Just the three of us. I got my eye on the very schooner we want to take us over. I'll handle it all, old boy. You got nothin' to do but come along, see? Leave it to me! We'll all be rich! Gold—"

The rattan screen billowed outward on the wind that poured from an open window, and this time I won a glimpse of the whole scene that was afterward to seem like the first act of the drama. I was not to forget that brief picture. Haggot and Rice and Rice's wife were posed like actors on a stage.

The big agent and Rice had their backs toward the door, the dentist being seated at his desk. The woman stood at the window, her figure outlined in the blazing sunshine.

I tell you this sight of her robbed me of breath, for it is not often one sees a beautiful woman. The phrase is trite and time worn, but no other words could describe her. Her Junoesque figure was stark in a clinging white garment. She gestured with her white parasol like a manikin, and her arched white throat was carved. Her face was striking, like that of the goddess Hera in marble; but it wasn't marble by any means. Her petulant, rose-lipped mouth looked moist and promising. Her wide blue eyes smiled mockery for innocence; and her hair, piled above small ears, was a tumble of gold in sunlight.

Good Lord, what a lady she was! Bold figured and big, with a pouty red mouth and solid gold hair, she could have broken up a prayer meeting or panicked a monastery. How in the world had the little gray dentist on Prince Edward's Lane managed to lead such a lady to the altar? No doubt his bank account had helped.

I would have gaped had my position not been precarious. But she did not see me. She was bending an unfathomable gaze on Brander Haggot.

The big man straightened his stalwart shoulders and leaned toward her. Enoch Rice was bent over a scratching pen. The big man and the woman were looking at each other.

Rice sighed, holding out a paper.

"There's a check."

Abruptly two things occurred to me. It occurred to me that Brander Haggot might seriously resent the fact of an outsider overhearing his plans for a gold hunt; so I picked up my cap and departed the office in haste and discretion. This occurred to me, also. The three of them were trekking off somewhere by themselves. Could not some of the gold that Brander Haggot hoped to win be found in Mrs. Rice's hair?

Long, hard working hours and meager pay has always been routine in the British merchant marine. When my ship made port in Cape Town I quit my job as bosun and gave "standing four on and four off" as the reason. However, there was another inducement. An old mariner friend wanted me to run his trading schooner up the Mozambique coast to pick up poached ivory, deliver mail, and carry supplies to some of those God-lost backwaters in Portuguese East. Adventure!

I sailed the Asian Witch out of Port Natal, up the rim of Gazaland, and into a river that could have led to the underworld.

It did.

The hedge of jungle bordering the bay shore was a lusting mouth, the coiling river a throat. Yellow and green. But the daylight yellow was tainted by the steam drifting up in the hot air; the jungle was the color of grass sprouting out of garbage; the squirming river, dappled with lily pads and whorls of scum, ran water the green of a sick man's cheek.

The tidy white schooner did not belong on that hothouse spillway. That sneaking channel was a place for crocodiles and sleepy hippos, rotting logs, poisonous vines, diseased trees. Dismal cranes and pelicans flapped along the swampy shore. Serpents fat as a man's arm were ropes of death coiled on the steaming mud banks. Bulbous spiders drifted by, riding floating mats of leaves. One wondered if one's ears were deaf from the quinine, or if the stagnant quiet was real.

The Asian Witch wandered up the flood, and the jungle closed in on her stern. I slapped at mosquitoes, panted in the heat, and dourly

wondered what human being could be living in this fever hole long enough to acquire a load of ivory for the shipping. The river meandered with a maddening unconcern for time or the troubles of navigating a schooner powered by a senile gas engine; and the steaming, drugged afternoon dragged.

The sun was westering when the colored boy standing lookout on the bow halloed that the town was in sight, and I swung the Asian Witch into the broad lagoon that made an elbow in the river.

I'd raised some unhealthy ports in my life, but that jungle village squatting on the mud banks was the most uninviting spot I had ever seen. From a distance the native huts rambling down the shore looked like beehives set out in the sun to rot. A larger hut than the rest, obviously the local meeting house—no Christian institution in that black community—commanded the center of a clearing fenced in by pointed stakes.

A collapsing tin shed and a collapsed tin wharf sprawling at water's edge reminded of the days before the government at Lisbon forgot that Portugal owned Mozambique. The scribble of trash-strewn, muck-running lanes filled with pickaninnies, goats and hens, the rank green jungle closing in on all sides, the fevery mist that hung like thin fog over the town, spoke good reason for Portugal's forgetting the place.

I brought the Asian Witch around, and the entire population of the village, including the goats and hens, crowded the rotten wharf. By no means did I like the looks of the reception committee, and I wasn't slow in making a display of the automatic in my belt.

The schooner slid into a slip alongside the wharf that was like a sewer and the black natives set up a gabble. The women, naked as Eve and ninety times as ugly, didn't make any difference; but the male population looked like a deportation from hell.

It was a crowd to make one's flesh crawl, I can swear to that. Black bodies glistened with grease. Brass bracelets jangled on skinny arms and toothpick legs under bloated stomachs. Every body and face was made hideous by cicatrized tattooing, scarred with slit lips, nose rings, bone spikes thrust through the nostrils. Shiny, ebony masks, grotesque as nightmares. Some wore chunks of glass stabbed through the lower lip. Several affected hoops set in the mouth like a pelican's bill.

Their protruberant eyes bulged like pools of milk in their knobby

heads. Chicken feathers, rags of monkey skin, parrot plumes did for clothing. More than one grin betrayed a row of filed teeth to mark the owner a witness of cannibalistic rites. A nice crowd to meet with the sun going down!

My Swahili boy was as uneasy as I happened to be, and I saw him fumbling his *juju* bag, no doubt to ward off a plunge into a cooking pot. Automatic in hand, I was prepared to address the grinning, malodorous crowd, when I saw a sun helmet bobbing to the fore. This must be the agent supposed to meet me.

He elbowed his way through the smelly press of unlovely savages, and shambled down the wharf's edge, gesturing. When I saw it was Enoch Rice, the Singapore dentist I had met two years before, I got a real shock.

The two years had dealt unkindly with the man. He looked almost shrunken in his shapeless cotton suit; round-shouldered; aging. A shock of hair straggled down his forehead. His mouth was pale. His chin was blue with lack of shaving. He wore neither shirt nor collar, and but for the mild blue eyes and nervous smile I might not have recognized him.

"I'm late," he greeted. "Haggot told me t' stand by an' look for you. I say, friend, you haven't a spot of whiskey on deck, eh? Got a drink handy? Yeh. Haggot says you would be bringin' in a few kegs for us. Y'might just pass me a drink if there's any about."

He stood at the beam rail of the schooner, and his voice was an alcoholic gust.

A minute I stood too surprised to reply. Rice balanced there, fumbling his hands, and the swarm of barbarians waited behind him while the jungle, ripe with amber twilight, waited back of them. I was remembering the little office back on Prince Edward's Lane; the picture of Rice hunched over his desk; the big man, Haggot, looming beside him; his wife posing in front of a sun-flooded window.

Gold! They had talked of gold. All that two years ago. Rice's wife had been a statue of Juno come to life, vibrant-voiced. And the man, Haggot, was big and blond with gold teeth.

Big and blond and the gold teeth gleaming in his mouth, Haggot appeared. There was a sudden commotion among the natives, a cessation of chatter and a scramble of bare feet. Brander Haggot wasn't el-

bowing his way through that black gathering. The dark-skinned devils made haste to stand aside. A lane opened up before the towering sun helmet, and the stalwart Haggot came striding down the wharf.

The two years had not worn Brander Haggot. If anything it had wedged more muscles on his enormous shoulders and given an added thrust to his chin. His face had tanned to the color of cordovan leather, and his loud voice carried a note of command that made those black Africans kowtow. The man's personality spoke power, brute force, fearlessness. The figure of Rice seemed to fade in Haggot's presence.

"Ahoy the schooner," he boomed. Rice was shouldered, literally and figuratively, out of the way. "Come to pick up those *boxes of dirt*, have you? We've been looking for you. I'll have my boys board you in th' morning and carry off the supplies. We'll do business tomorrow. Meantime come on up to our bungalow. It's good to see a white man, damn it! I'm Haggot. Brander Haggot." He clapped a palm hard on Rice's shoulder. The smaller man reeled. "This is my partner, Enoch Rice."

Something in the way he had slapped his companion's back, something in his tone of voice, implied contempt.

He had said "boxes of dirt" with marked emphasis. My employers had said "ivory." I was quick enough to guess that Haggot was poaching the stuff and shipping it in packing boxes; didn't want the natives to learn about it. It seemed to me there would be mighty little chance of the Portuguese government trying to enforce law in that forsaken hole, but I said nothing.

Haggot got me by the arm and steered me up the wharf, asking questions, and Rice drifted along behind, inconspicuous and half drunk.

Haggot wanted me to spend the night in their bungalow, and to this I agreed. It would be interesting to follow up this little drama I had chanced upon in Singapore. Had I guessed how it was soon coming to a climax, I might have been less anxious to learn of it!

A clearing had been chopped out of the jungle at the far edge of the town, and the bungalow was a tribute to white man's ingenuity. It certainly was an attractive little place for such a rotten locale. Haggot occupied a sort of annex; Rice and his wife lived in the larger portion, and there was a spacious living room, screened and cool.

I gathered that Rice had footed the building costs and that his wife

had added the feminine touch to give it a semblance of home. Certainly Haggot's quarters were comfortable and the screened-in veranda pleasantly shadowed by a large baobab tree.

We sat on the veranda with whiskies, buried there in blue-black African night, the jungle whispery around us. Haggot monopolized the conversation; and I marveled at Mrs. Rice who could lounge so coolly complacent with glass and cigarette—a voluptuous, vibrant goddess of legendary beauty remaining rose-fresh in a land where pine boards rotted in a day. She surely didn't inspire churchy thoughts by her habit of lowering her eyes, arching her lips and murmuring.

Rice—she called her husband by his last name—was a forgotten wraith smiling fatuously, wordless in an out-of-the-way corner. Lyda Rice turned her promising smile at me or Brander Haggot, but she was attentive to her husband to this extent—she never let his whisky glass go empty. After the fifth, the gray man's meek eyes filmed and his smile was a fixture.

Haggot's talk was loud. He told me how *he* had built this bungalow.

"And we come out here lookin' for gold, friend. We'll find it some day. Been here a couple years now. Placer mining up these lousy creeks. Rice washes for ore about a mile from here. My camp is ten miles up the river." His tone said that Rice had it soft, while he, Haggot, was hard-boiled enough to work a tough claim far in the hinterland.

"I been shippin' boxes of dirt down to Durban to have 'em analyzed by a geologist there," Haggot went on. "Reckon we can keep you busy totin' that muck for another year. But I hope to hit a pay load soon; eh, Rice?"

Rice nodded dully. I wondered why Haggot pursued the pretense of shipping dirt in those long packing cases. Weren't the little dentist and his wife in on the ivory poaching, too? Perhaps Haggot was working the game alone on the side. I wondered; and knew enough not to ask.

"These black tribesmen in here are a wild-looking lot," I made comment. "Look like decadent Bantus or Zulus to me. My Swahili boy was scared to death of 'em. Must give you the creeps to live so near that village. They look damned dangerous."

Haggot spat, and held out a fist like a bludgeon. "Pah! You see that, friend? They've felt it. They may be savages, but they know who's boss of these woods, you bet! They don't monkey with *me*!"

Lyda made a lithe shift in her chair. "They're just terrified to death of Brander," she told me. A lazy ribbon of smoke drifted from her pursed lips, and she smiled at Haggot with veiled eyes. "Brander shot a lion the first day we arrived. And he knocked over a black for standing within three feet of me. I don't like that horrid witch-doctor, Umzizi, who lives in the village, and Brander told him never to show his face in front of me. He doesn't, either. Brander killed another lion, and the village has made him a sort of king. Haven't they, Brand?"

"They'd better have," he growled. "I've been in African jungles before, friend, and I know how to handle these babies. Make 'em think you're a god, see? The village just about worships me, now. I make those niggers step fast for me, too. An' they do. I'm big medicine around here. If any man in these woods laid a hand on me, those natives would tear him to shreds for doing it." He chuckled. "Yeh. They've made me a king."

A bony-kneed black wobbled out of the bungalow with a fresh supply of soda water and bowed and kowtowed most respectfully to Haggot before retiring. When the glasses were to be filled again, it was discovered that Eben Rice had slipped out of his chair and disappeared.

"Rice is getting tight, again," his wife said with a disparaging smile, laying a smooth hand on my arm. "You've no idea how drunk the little man keeps himself. Hates it out here, you know. We all hate it, of course, but the thing to do is stick it out." Her smile was that of the cheerful martyr. "I don't know what I'd do if it wasn't for Bra—Mr. Haggot, here, and the few visitors who come up on river boats. Rice spends most of the time at his horrid placer mine or tramping in the jungle. I tell him he's going native, poor dear. Now he's gone out back to see his leopard cub. He found the creature in a trap and insists on keeping the beast around. Rather sit with that silly animal than visit with human beings. You really must excuse him, won't you?"

And Haggot chuckled: "Rice used to be a dentist." He found humor in this. "Can you imagine a toothwrecker barging off into jungles after gold and bringin' his wife to a hole like this? So far the only gold Rice has seen around here is some we brought with us." He grinned and rapped a fingernail on the four gold teeth in his upper jaw. "The gold on them teeth. Rice made 'em for me, himself."

A plaintive sigh escaped Mrs. Rice; her shoulders made a gliding movement as she turned to the whisky tray; then she held up a hand. "Listen!"

Haggot halted a reach for a cigarette; and I sat up in my chair. Now we could plainly hear the sound, stealing through the opaque dark that made a black curtain outside the veranda screen.

Room-booma-boom! Room-booma-boom!

Somber, insistent, cadent. The measured throb of a *dingwinti* drum undertoned by the sullen beat of a tom-tom. Secure on the lamp-lit veranda, I had forgotten Africa. Now it was calling to be remembered. No sound in the world is as weird and blood-stirring as the primitive music of African devil-drums pulsing through the night.

Room-booma-boom! A sound to make your hair stiffen.

"They're dancing," Mrs. Rice whispered. Haggot nodded. The sound gained volume, augmented by chanting voices, the rattle of *juju* gourds, the stamp of bare feet on beaten earth. Haggot pointed; and I looked beyond the dark trunk of the baobab tree, across the compound.

A thin growth of jungle separated that end of the compound from the outer edge of the village down on the river. The night had been thick in there. Now the solid dark was loosening in a misty red haze. The haze brightened, and became a blaze dancing behind the scatter of trees.

Louder and louder sounded the devil-drums, the crackle of gourds, the stamp of feet, the chanting. The fire grew as if fed by the noise. Flame-tongues flickered, tossing a scarlet glow that made a red mushroom blossom in the center of the waterside village. The drums attained a maddening pitch. The fire was a livid stain on the black curtain. Suddenly an unholy, crescendo scream writhed up out of the basso drone, and the skin tingled on the nape of my neck.

"Good God, man, what was that?" I must have looked moist around the gills. Mrs. Rice had shrilled an exclamation, and Haggot was generously patting her hand. He shrugged.

"Not much," he told me. "Those devil niggers are throwing a little evil to scare evil away. Reckon they're burning a villager at the stake." He laughed uneasily. "Happens here every once in a while."

"But, great Scott!" I looked from Haggot to Mrs. Rice, who seemed more interested at his hand on hers. The sweat wanted to start on my

forehead, too. "You don't mean to say they're murdering a man down there. Burning him at the stake? I say! Can't you stop it?"

"Not a chance," Haggot growled. "I may be the Almighty to 'em, but I don't fool with their local voodooisms long as they don't concern me! If they want to burn themselves up, I won't stop 'em. A dead Zulu is a good Zulu, anyhow. And this powwow is something particular. Last night a big leopard attacked the village and killed an old woman, see? Her family confabs with the witch-doctor, who burns a few charms an' tells 'em the leopard was none other than Mr. So-and-so, who lives three doors away. Reckon the victim is no pal of the witch-doctor. So the old woman's family tells the story around town. The town accuses Mr. So-and-so of bein' a were-leopard, and burns him at the stake. Were-leopards are an old bugaboo in this country."

I gasped. "Were-leopards?"

"Sure. You've heard of were-wolves. These leopards are the same thing, see? The blacks believe a man can change himself into a leopard at night. In animal form he sneaks around and kills off an enemy. It's weird, all right. Every once in a while a leopard knocks off a villager, here, an' th' town takes it out on some poor fool. But forget it. This is Africa." Haggot grinned. "Let's have a drink around and turn in."

He patted Mrs. Rice on the cheek. He picked up his glass; and she poured, smiling. He yawned, and the light on his gold teeth made a tiny glow in his mouth.

I turned in sweating and chill. Outside the drums throbbed and boomed. My window-blind opened on a rear veranda. I could just distinguish a shadow, stationary in the darkness; just catch a muted hint of breathing. It was Enoch Rice sitting there asleep, back propped against a post, a young leopard nestled on his lap.

That I should have been there to see the ghastly climax of the affair was due more to Brander Haggot's planning than to chance.

After my first night there I hated the place. Once a month thereafter I was forced to drive the Asian Witch up that putrid river and spend a night in that ghoulish jungle town.

Never a time I walked past the witch-doctor's *kraal* but I thought of those cannibals howling around a human torch. Twice I noticed evidence of a fresh bonfire in the staked-in clearing. Always the sight of those barbarous villagers, the glow of a flame in darkness, or the

echo of a wooden drum got me by the neck-nape.

But that wasn't all. There were Haggot and the woman and Rice. Haggot with his bluff manner, powerful shoulders, putting jaw, gold-toothed grin. Rice, a mouse-gray, besotted character with meek eyes and a corner to sit in. His wife—a promising mouth and calculating eyes.

Any fool could have seen what was happening between Haggot and Mrs. Rice. They were making of Rice a buffoon. His days he spent placer mining at a jungle bog. Evenings he spent in a corner with a bottle.

Haggot was supposed to be washing ore somewhere upstream. He sputtered up the river in a motor launch and was gone for several days. But he wasn't placer mining. He had an elephant gun secreted up there, or I missed my guess. And he was shipping tusks back to Durban and calling the cargo 'boxes of dirt.' Packing cases of dirt they were; but you didn't have to dig far to find the ivory.

As for Mrs. Rice: that part of the affair was absurd. The way she would turn that languorous, red-lipped, brazen-eyed smile at Haggot; the way he, in turn, would pat her cheek, fondle her hand, slap her familiarly. It made me mad! Mad at Rice.

If I had been Rice I'd have kicked the bounder out of my bungalow long ago and dragged my wife around by the hair of her head. Or would I? Was Rice aware of it? Did he see it with his meek, alcohol-bleared eyes? Besides, Haggot had the shoulders of an ox, and eyes that could go small and red with rage, and a ruthless jaw. He was a king to the savage villagers. I remembered his words: "They'd kill the man who touched me."

Or was Rice content with his share of the ivory?

It was none of my business, of course; but it was getting to be a show I found unpleasant. I felt sorry for Rice, even as I despised him. He looked so lonely and shoved out of the way. My fourth visit up there, I noticed the little man's leopard cub wasn't around; asked him what had become of his pet. He told me it had grown too big; Lyda had wanted it sent away; he had let it go free in the jungle.

"Only friends I got now," he told me plaintively, "are my wife an' Brander. Once we lived in Singapore, mister. I—I had money then. I've sunk all that into this place, now. But that's all right. But it was nice in Singapore, Lyda and I were just married. "I," shyly, "was a dentist—"

"You did some work for me," I reminded. "Remember?"

He shook his head. "Had so many customers, you see. I liked the work. I say," he fumbled in his jacket, "look. I've been carrying this little set ever since. For luck. Look here."

He brought from his pocket a little leather case; snapped it open and proudly displayed a set of gleaming dental instruments. Like an artist exhibiting his brushes. His hands trembled. He had wanted to talk to somebody for a long time; to show these instruments; tell about Singapore.

"But I sold out to come to this place. Everything except these few tools. But it's all right. Lyda wants to stick it out here. Brander promises we'll find gold. Good man, Brander is. I'll stay if my wife wants to. But listen! Last—last week the natives here burned another man. I was in the village when the dance started. It—oh, it was horrible." He clutched my arm, and his face was suddenly moist. "My God, how they tortured him! And the drums! The drums! They *burned* him, finally.—he was accused of being a were-leopard."

We had been standing alone on the veranda, and at this juncture Haggot and Mrs. Rice strolled arm in arm from the bungalow. Rice, retreated to a far corner. Haggot dominated the remainder of the talk.

It was seven weeks before I sailed the *Asian Witch* up the river to dock her at the tin wharf, again. I remember the details clearly. Haggot had sent word overland for me to come at once. He was sending a big shipment to Durban if the *Asian Witch* could carry it right away. My employer shelved a cargo of copra, and I pushed the schooner full speed. In Durban there had been talk. The Portuguese government was going to investigate reports of ivory poaching in their East African territories. I wondered.

The *Asian Witch* tied in at the tin wharf just at sundown. The village was sweltering after a rain. I noticed Haggot's launch waiting at dockside, apparently standing by for a run upriver. But nobody save black natives stood on the wharf to meet me. The native headman started his boys to work at once; and I watched them stow five wooden packing cases aboard. By that time it was dark and I was clawing at mosquito-bites.

Ordinarily, Haggot had made a point of overseeing his cargo

stowage. What was detaining him? I dismissed my Swahili boy—he had won friends in the village and wanted to call on the coalblack, sin-ugly headman's daughter—and I tramped across town alone, plodding up the patch for the bungalow.

I don't know why, but the darkhung path through the trees made my palms prickle that night. Water dripped from the whispering foliage. Muck sloshed underfoot. The lamps in the bungalow made pale spots of yellow floating through sweaty gloom.

The lighted veranda was deserted. Without overture, I pushed through the matting door into the living room. And was stopped dead in my tracks! I almost bumped into them. Haggot and Mrs. Rice. They stood together, fast in each other's arms, embracing—the sort of kiss one sees in an exaggerated movie fade-out. For the second they did not even notice my entry. And I stood like a wooden dummy, mouth open, I wager. Frankly, I was shocked. Good Lord, what if Rice should see this!

And Enoch Rice *was* seeing it! When I saw him there, sitting mute in the shadows at the other end of the room, I almost let fly an oath of astonishment. The lamp-glow just touched his face, finding it a pallid oval, expressionless, damp. His eyes I could not see. But his white mouth was smiling a faint smile; and his hands were dead white butterflies in his lap.

His gaze wandered to me, and he spoke. He spoke in a mild mechanical voice. "They're going away, you see. They're going away."

Haggot spun around, facing me. "Oh, it's you. Yes, Mrs. Rice and I are going away together, friend. She doesn't love Rice any more, and she's going back with me. We're going back with you on your schooner. You can take us to Durban."

He grinned. "Surprised, are yuh? So was Rice, I reckon. We just now told him about it. Lyda and me have loved each other for a long time, see? So we just told Rice we're going away together. Guess it doesn't bother him much."

An unsteady, acquiescent laugh came from Rice's weak smile. "I guess it wouldn't matter much if it did bother me, Brander."

And Haggot snapped: "You're right, partner. Lyda and me know what we want, don't we, Lyda?" He chucked her under the chin; turned to me. "You got those boxes of dirt stowed aboard your schooner? Good. I gotta run up th' river tonight, see? Finish some

business up there. I'll be back tomorrow sundown. You be ready to sail pronto. Lyda and I want to clear out. I'm leavin' Rice have my mine claims an' all that—"

"But," protested the man in the corner, mildly. "what you bother about shippin' boxes of ore for, Brander, if you're quittin' the game? If you—and Lyda are going back to civilization, then why—"

I had been stunned. Now I saw the whole thing, and anger burned my cheek. "You're bein' cheated, you fool!" I yelped, taking a step toward Rice. "This man isn't shippin' dirt to be analyzed in Durban. Why, you sniveling idiot! He's been sending ivory—"

The woman screamed. Haggot shot out a hand, and his iron fingers bit like teeth into my wrist.

"Stop!" he bawled. Veins bulged on his brow, and his face was a scarlet mask of fury. "You mind your own business, damn you! I'm runnin' this show. Those are boxes of *dirt*! When I say dirt, I mean it. Now I'm hirin' that schooner, an' you are hired to run it, see? With your mouth shut. When I get back tomorrow night, this woman an' me are goin' aboard an' you'll take us to the coast. You mind your own damn job, or I'll break open your face for you!"

Rice was on his feet, and his quiet voice demanded attention. "Never mind, young man," he advised. His tone was genial. A wistful smile crossed his lips as he gestured resignation. "I'm satisfied. Lyda, I saw you kiss him. You say you love him. All right. If you want to go away with him when he comes back tomorrow evening, go. Go, my dear. And good luck!"

He was like a wraith as he slipped through the matting door. The footsteps carrying him away made no sound. The door swished shut behind him.

I spent the night aboard the Asian Witch. A night of pessimisms and mosquitoes. Somewhere around twelve o'clock I heard Haggot shouting commands and tramping on the tin dock. His motor launch sputtered. A backwash of water slapped under my schooner's stern. The cough of the launch engine died away; and I knew he had turned the bend in the river.

Veiled in mosquito nets, I poked out of my stove-hot cabin, and arranged to sleep on deck. I went to sleep wishing I had flung a fist at

Haggot's mouth three hours before, for all that it had been none of my business. I woke up vaguely distraught; gained my feet in a world of dawn-mist five minutes before sunrise.

Something was going on in the native village. I could hear the yelling that had waked me, and made out black bodies darting through the mists wandering the waterside. A smear of rose grew in the sky eastward as I stood on the schooner's bow, and the mists began to loosen like windblown smoke. Certainly the village was in an uproar. The lanes between the huts were crowded with jabbering groups of men. Excitement was in the air. The very feel of it made me uneasy.

My Swahili came loping down the wharf, and from him I pried the news. A leopard had attacked the village in the darkness before dawn, killed an infant, and fled back into the jungle. The natives were preparing to beat the brush and capture the beast. The infant's mother was already palavering with the witch-doctor.

Some one would be accused that was certain. Some one would surely burn at the stake for this fresh outrage. The gods would be consulted. The gods would tell. And would I, the white master of the white ship, like to go ashore and join the leopard hunt?

I decided in favor of a cup of coffee and my cabin. Day broke in a sultry heat. The morning was tortured by a steady wailing and thrashing and furor unleashed in the bereaved village. Shortly after I had finished my breakfast a black boy boarded the schooner with a note from Mrs. Rice. She had written to ask me if I would aid her in getting her luggage down to the boat! I marveled at the woman's brass. My first impulse was to tell her to go hellward on a holiday. Then curiosity got the better of me and I trotted up to the bungalow.

I had hoped to see Rice but he wasn't there. His wife blithely informed me she had not seen him since his departure the previous evening. He had, she supposed, spent the night on the rear veranda, and gone out to his placer mine. Now would I help her get this silly load of luggage down to the schooner?

By Heaven, I've seen some brazen females in my life, but I've never seen one as soulless as that Lyda Rice. Here she was coolly walking out on her husband, running off with another man, and preparing herself for the journey with as little concern or conscience as a Parisian actress starting for Lido Beach. Lord! She hummed as she darted about the

bungalow. She fussed with her golden hair, arched her eyes at me, and finally got me by the lapels of my coat.

"You don't like me, do you, mister sailor?" Her lips pouted up at me. She was coy. "You ought to be glad Brander and I are going back on your old boat. We've been good company for you, haven't we? Oh, you think I'm bad, don't you? You wouldn't understand. You're just a boy."

If I had a finger of Scotch in me I'd have kicked her shins for that.

"I think you're playin' that husband of yours a lousy trick," I snarled at her. "You and your big boy, Haggot. Takin' advantage of a sap. Got him to sell out his dentist business and come out here and foot the bills, thinkin' it was a treasure hunt. Then Haggot cleans up poaching ivory, and when he's got a fortune laid by the two of you make a get-away, and leave the little guy stranded in his hell-hole!"

I was so mad I cleared right out of the bungalow, driving her luggage-laden house boy before me.

"I'll see you on your boat when Brander comes back at sunset," she sang out after me; and I could hear her cheerfully whistling as I turned down the path to the village. By George, I swore to myself, if Rice had lifted a finger of protest to stop this lousy affair I'd have given him an aiding fist.

But I forgot Mrs. Rice when I reached the village. Under the blazing noon sun the town was seething with the uproar of shouting men. I gathered that the latest leopard-killing had goaded local sentiment to a fever pitch. I could see a mob of natives milling around their witch-doctor's *kraal*, howling like hyenas.

Remembering the local superstition, chills trickled down my spine. It wouldn't be long before the obliging witch-doctor would satisfy that cry for vengeance and blood by denouncing some wretched villager as the were-leopard, and nightfall would bring the atrocious sacrifice. I didn't tarry among those grass huts. I got aboard the Asian Witch, dumped Mrs. Rice's luggage on the fore deck, and shut myself in my cabin, feeling ill.

A touch of fever was in me and I must have slept like dreamless death, for my Swahili boy was at my bunk shaking me before I realized the passage of time.

"Master, come quick to the village!" The lad's eyes were rolling, and he chattered in great excitement. "Come see, master. They have caught the leopard that killed the child early this morning. They have just trapped the leopard. Come see!"

Without ceremony I kicked him out of the cabin. If there was one thing I didn't want to see it was that African mob howling around a leopard trap. I went out on deck, though, and was surprised to find the afternoon waning.

Already the sun was low, enameling red the surface of the river and obliterating with kindly shadow the foul alleys of the town. The lanes of waterside were deserted. From the direction of the witch-doctor's *kraal* drifted a hullabaloo that could only be raised by jungle men one generation ahead of apes. The infernal noise brought me fully awake. The whole town must have been called together in a crowd and told to scream.

I tell you that fiendish racket was awful to hear with the twilight coming on, mysterious, swift, weighted with jungle-stench and late-day heat. I stood listening on the deck of the Asian Witch, and my palms itched and prickled.

Suddenly a drum began to throb.

Room-booma-boom! The somber beat of a *dingwinti*. Another drum took up the challenge. Then another. Then tom-toms.

Room-booma-boom! The sound of fists on kettles. The sound of shin-bones beating taut-drawn skin. In a moment the fetid air was quivering. In another moment it was dusk.

The villagers were starting the devil-dance. I smelled smoke before I caught sight of fire-glow. Above the peaked roofs of the huts I could just glimpse tongue-tips of red fire licking at the sky above the witch-doctor's fenced compound.

Night fell about the village with tropic abruptness. The waterside village was a dark smudge save where the fire-glow picked out a few rooftops. The flame-tips blossomed bright. Red and black.

Now the drums were going like mad. *Room-boom-boom!* Beating time to an unearthly, tuneless, ceaseless rant from the natives. The most appalling chorus out of hell. Dante never conceived an Inferno like it.

Heaven knows how I managed to catch the *put-put-put* of a motor

launch distant but approaching. It was Haggot, returning from his journey upriver. I recalled that he was due to be back at sundown.

I was on the point of going forward to put a light on my schooner's bow when a shadow sprang up the gangway and my Swahili was a dancing wraith at my elbow.

"The leopard, master! Come see it quick! Quick! They know him, master. It is one of the white men, master! Big medicine! *Juju!* It is he! He!"

His voice broke into staccato, unintelligible jargon. But he had said enough to turn the heart cold in my chest and send me leaping after him to the wharf. The "leopard" was one of the white men! How had those superstitious black fiends come to this conclusion? My mind was leaden with horror. I couldn't think. I could only propel my feet.

How we ran! Those dark-hung lanes were alleys in the bottom of a pit, treacherous snares. But the boy knew his way; and I kept on his heels. Lord knows what I imagined I could do. But I wanted to see that were-leopard; and I ran. We skirted the center of the village, and brought up panting at the edge of the jungle.

"It is here, master," panted the Swahili. "They found it tied in those bushes an hour past. It was tied to a stake."

Then we were in the midst of a struggling press of naked bodies. A red flare came looping through the dark, and a giant Negro with a torch pushed his way to the fore. Believe me, I was ill as sin in the middle of that African crowd; but they never noticed me. They were gazing in awe at a huddled, black corpse spraddled in the mud under the brushwood. The dead native's face leaked crimson, fluent streams. In his fist he clutched a severed strand of rope.

A *severed* rope, you understand. I saw that the rope had been cut by human hand; but those wild villagers didn't see it. They were shrieking and pointing like maniacs.

"The dead one is the headman's son," my Swahili managed to yell in my ear. "He was left at this spot guarding the leopard, alone. He has just been found dead. The beast has broken its bonds, killed its guard and vanished. The villagers say it is *juju*, master. The leopard was a man. It will return in human form, master. It was the white man!"

Several of the natives dashed away in the darkness. The remaining

few stood screaming.

"How do they know?" I bawled. "How do they tell who this leopard was? It is a lie! Tell them! There is no way for a man to become leopard. Tell them, fool."

"They knew the leopard truly," the Swahili screamed. "I, too! I saw the beast, master. With my own eyes I saw it. It was the white man. I knew which man it was, master. *The leopard had the white man's mouth!*"

A sudden, terrible storm of screaming broke loose, right then, in the village. The giant with the torch bounded past me, and the other natives who had found the guard's corpse went after him. Back through the village ran the knot of blacks. Sweating in terror, I sprinted after them.

I don't know yet where Mrs. Rice came from. I saw a white ghost clinging to a mud wall; then she was grabbing at my sleeve, running in step with me through that evil *cul-de-sac*, screeching in hysterical fright. She must have been on her way down to the schooner. I didn't ask. I ran like the devil, not caring whether she kept step or not; but she did not fall behind.

Racing like an antelope, the black ruffian with the torch led the chase straight through the village to the edge of the river; straight to join a howling, screaming, maniac mob that was storming across the old tin wharf.

Skinny black arms reached skyward, waving firebrands. Shiny black heads made a tossing sea of grotesque knobs dotted by baleful, bulbous white eyes. The old dock groaned under stamping feet. The din was deafening, paralyzing.

I caught at Mrs. Rice, dragged her to my side into the shadow of a bamboo wall, and crouched, panting, to watch. I remember the ebony devils leaping like acrobats, mouths squalling and afoam, on the outer fringe of the black press. I remember a sight of the witch-doctor, a gibbous, paint-daubed little demon stirring the riot to frenzy by his soprano screams. I remember the way the mob stampeded up the mud bank from the river, formed in a roaring line and started a triumphant march back to the dancing ground where the stake, the fire and drums were waiting.

I shall not soon forget the sight of that marching, howling parade of

depraved savages as it swept by on its way. I shall never forget my view of the victim. The torches wavered high; and I saw him very well. He was carried in the sweat-wet arms of the giant headman, and a ghastly burden he was. Except for one thing I never could have recognized him, because that mob that had caught him landing on the mud bank not two minutes before had literally torn him to pieces. But his mangled, dead face hung toward me; and I saw in his yawning mouth the glitter of gold. Haggot!

Mrs. Rice flopped unconscious into the mud; and I stooped to drag her safe from those tramping, stamping, black bare feet.

It was then I glimpsed the other face. Peering from a clump of bushes across the way, just touched by the glow from a passing flare. The eyes in that face shone like diamonds. The grinning mouth made of it a jubilant mask. The mouth seemed to laugh out once. Then the leaves of the bush rustled softly together, and the face of Enoch Rice, the dentist, disappeared.

I took Mrs. Rice back to the coast, and she looked old. And that's about all there is to the story, save for the incident some weeks later at Dar-es-Salaam. On the veranda of the hotel, there, I overheard a strange conversation.

"On the boat up from Durban, he was," an Australian was saying. "I tell you, it was some show. The leopard this chap had was a mighty bad lookin' animal, too. Isn't often you can tame those devils, but this one was meek as two mics. The fellow was taking him back to England, he said, an' going to show him in circuses, fairs and the like. He'll make a fortune out of it, too, or I miss my guess. Why, he had that leopard out on deck, an' handled him like you'd pet a lamb.

"Funny, the fellow was such a mild sort of bird, too. Retirin' sort of guy. But the leopard was his pal. Why, he'd stick his fist in that leopard's mouth, and tweak its tail. Give you the chills to see! But here's the amazing thing! Here's the thing that popped the eyes outa my head! Listen! In that bloody leopard's upper jaw—right smack in front where you couldn't help but see them—there were four gold teeth!"

The British officers were inclined to disbelieve the Australian.

I believed him!

Vice Lord Carson carried secret orders which no man suspected until it was much too late

Reach for the stars

By V. E. Thiessen

Pride was a hot haze in the First Lord's mind as he strode across the smooth concrete ramp toward the ship that lay ahead. "This is it," he thought. "After all these years, this is it. *Man's destiny lies in the stars.*" His feet sounded softly on the concrete, a little whispering song of victory.

Behind him Vice Lord Karson struggled to keep up, scuttling along on underdeveloped legs, drinking great draughts of air. Moments later they stood in the lee of the smooth metal ship, gazing up at her. It took the First Lord back to the days of his youth. But no woman had ever had the beauty of this.

He said, "She's a far cry from the one we sent to the Moon, isn't she?"

Karson murmured dryly, "Yes, more's the pity."

His words swung the other toward him. The First Lord of the Rocket Arm stared at the Vice Lord. He said slowly, "A pity— what do you mean? We reached the moon, and now we're ready for Mars. After that, the stars. What do you mean, a pity? Our destiny lies out there!"

He stared at his companion as he waited for an answer, wondering what Karson could have in mind. A strange figure, Karson, almost physically ugly, with his barrel chest and head and his thin legs. A brilliant man, one without friends, who had risen from the Academy of War to his present position more rapidly than any man in Terra's history.

Karson said soberly, "*We're not ready.*"

The First Rocket Lord frowned, considering that.

"The ship is perfect," he declared, "and Captain Jekka can handle her. He made the moon trip, you know."

"I wasn't thinking of Captain Jekka," Karson said. "I wasn't even

thinking of us. I was thinking of life, out there." He swept a hand toward the sky.

"What are you driving at?" the First Lord stared at the other man. Something in Karson's eyes seized him then, some intensity, making Karson's quiet words strike home.

Karson said, "Remember the last war. The total war of the planet. Man's emotional instability is like a disease. I was thinking of what it might do spread out there." Karson's thin arm was dramatic against the sky.

For an instant the First Lord stared, and then laughter surged in him, hot and triumphant. "Look at her," he cried. "Look at this ship and deny man's destiny. Look at the man coming yonder and deny man's fitness."

Across the concerte the athletic figure of Captain Jekka appeared. He walked rapidly to join them, his lean brown face alight with awe.

The First Lord said, "Hello, Jekka. What do you think?"

Jekka's eyes were sparkling. He said, "How can I tell you? She's like a woman; she's like a long cool glass of Thol; she's the key to the planets around us, perhaps even the key to the universe."

"Think you can handle her?"

"I hope so," Jekka said soberly, "I certainly hope so."

Karson swung suddenly, turning away from them so that they could not see his face.

The First Lord laid a hand on his shoulder, and felt the tension in Karson's body. He said, "Bring old sober-sides here a piece of the Low Canals, will you?"

Karson's words were a whisper, a whisper so low and tense that it touched the ancient in them, the buried superstitions, the caves of fear, and a chill as old as time ran through them.

"*You'll never see Mars,*" he whispered. Then he whirled, looking at them through eyes that had begun to mask their thoughts. He said, "It was just a feeling—a fear. I'm sorry," and whirled to walk away from them.

They stared after him. The First Lord said quietly, "If that had been anyone but Karson I'd put him under the truth serum and see what he meant. I'm going to change the guard completely. Better check every mechanical feature again yourself." He shrugged then, trying vainly to

recapture his former exuberance. He said, "You're a lucky man, Jekka. You'll be the first to see Mars. I wonder what you will find?"

Captain Jekka wondered too. He had little time as he prepared for take off, checking the myriad of last minute things. Then he put his finger on the first button, thinking, Here we go. Here goes man, into the stars.

He pressed the button and a pillar of flames grew under him. There was the strange feeling, the feeling of floating, of poised suspension as the ship began to lift. He pressed the second button, and was heavy in his seat as they shot into the sky.

There was worse pressure than that to come, and he turned his head, checking his two man crew. Technician Hays, at the electronic calculator, nodded his head and smiled. Technician Stevens, mechanic and co-pilot, grinned through the goggles of his rubber pressure suit, and spoke into the built in microphone.

His words came cheerily to Jekka's ears, "Let her rip, Captain, let her rip!"

Jekka settled into the cushioned seat, adjusting himself for comfort, for he would not be able to move for a time. Then he pushed buttons three and four.

It was as if a giant hand had seized him and thrust him back into the seat. His breath came aching into his chest and he could not move, crushed by the tremendous acceleration. All four of the rocket tubes were firing now, great blasts of power, and then in an instant sound ceased and he felt a fierce, wild exultation, knowing that they had passed the barrier of sound, and that now they were traveling faster than the roar of their flaming power. Light too was dimming around them. They were breaking free from the mother, breaking free from the earth, and moving into the night of space.

Two hours later he moved his hand against the controls and cut the acceleration. His weight returned to near normal and he shifted, stretching himself as a cat stretches. Beside him Stevens was doing the same.

He began to check the controls, to assure himself that the tremendous pressure of acceleration had not damaged either control or firing mechanisms. Behind him he could hear Hays muttering to himself, and he knew that Hays was doing a similar checking of the calculator.

He swung the ship one way and then another, so that for an instant they were traveling sidewise, like a satellite of earth, and could see the mother planet below, an incredibly huge ball.

"Controls check," he said cheerfully. "How about the calculator?"

Hays grinned, an agreeable, bug-like figure in the rubber pressure suit. He said, "Sweet as ever. Don't you worry, Captain, she'll figure a course anywhere you say."

"How about the ship?"

Stevens turned a dial on the instrument board, and peered into a pair of eyepieces. As he turned the dial tiny prisms rotated on the surface of the ship, and he could look back through a system of smoked lenses as if he were outside the ship, seeing the two tubes on each side, seeing the sleek animal hull of the ship illuminated by the fantastic fire that stretched behind her.

Stevens said, "Sound as could be, and you ought to see the flame from those rockets. It looks like the devil ought to be out there, forked tail and all."

Jekka felt the relief surge through him. Vice Lord Karson's ominous words had made him uneasy. He said, "Well, the worst of the acceleration is over. Why don't we get out of these suits and get comfortable. It's a long trip."

Behind them, day by day, the world dwindled. The stars were bright and strange in the hushed dark of space. All the men took on an odd quietness of speech, as if somehow they were aware of their own insignificance. And still the stars beckoned, and the red planet that was their objective began its first faint growth before their searching eyes.

Trouble came, inevitably, a few hours past Luna's orbit. It began with the calculator. The test pattern that they used as a routine check before calculating their position returned warped, unbelievable answers.

Hays took it apart finally, piece by piece, tube by tube, and piece by piece, tube by tube, it was in perfect working order.

He put it together, and still it made errors.

About that time they noticed that the earth, the moon, and the stars had taken on an odd, hazy appearance. There was nothing definitely different, yet it was impossible to escape the sensation of strangeness.

They took the calculator apart, working thirty hours without rest, no longer able to check their position. The rockets kept on, sending them somewhere at incredible speed.

And yet, the earth remained unchanged in size, as though all the fantastic power of the rocket tubes were being drained away in futile effort. Yet they knew the speed was real for when speed was increased they could feel the acceleration.

Mind whirling, Jekka felt a sudden gratitude for the detailed care of the first Vice Lord in selection of his crew. The strain was beginning to tell, and if any rocket men were emotionally stable, these two should be so.

They put the perfect parts of the calculator together, replacing all the tiny tubes, checking all the connections. When they were done Jekka ran a problem into the machine. Two times two, that was all he asked the master brain of the machine.

Clicking with smooth precision, tubes glowing, the machine returned the answer. It functioned perfectly, but its answer was *THREE!*

They stared at the machine as if it were alive, as if it were a fantastic traitor that had sold them out. Rage flared in them, and the huge raised fist of Stevens was stopped by the sharp command of Captain Jekka.

Stevens went away, sulking, and put his eye to the inspection pieces that checked the outside of the ship. He screamed then, an atavistic scream of fear, the timeless screaming fear of the unknown. He pointed at the eyepiece and his mouth worked but no words came out.

Jekka put his face to the eyepieces. He felt the chill of terror running through him, a cold fog of fear that seeped into the ship.

He could see the ship, sleekly perfect, three rockets flaring their great yellow streams of power. But once there had been four rockets, two on each side.

Two times two equals three!

They lived with that for a day, and then Stevens cracked. He came at the calculator with a toughened steel alloy wrench, and he turned the wrench on Jekka and Hays when they tried to stop him.

By the time they tied him and shot him full of sedative Hays was limping, and Jekka had a broken forearm.

And yet perhaps the struggle had its benefits, for afterward they sat

looking at each other, knowing that the time for fear had passed, and that they had to think this out.

Jekka said, "We've blundered into something new. Somehow space is twisted here, and normal physical and mathematical laws are changed."

Hays said slowly, "Perhaps this is normal, perhaps Earth exists in a sort of hyper space. Perhaps for the stars two times two is always three."

Jekko said softly, "I think not. I've been watching Earth pretty carefully these last two days. We seem to be in a sort of orbit around it, no matter how I steer away. So this twisted space must be a sort of layer, surrounding us like the Heavyside layer does closer in."

"Can we punch through?"

"We might, if we knew the path. But how can you calculate the path. This layer may be only miles thick, and still be as impenetratable as solid earth, until we learn its laws."

Hays said quietly, "You've tried going away from Earth, now try heading toward it."

Jekka tried. But the ship did not turn as it should. Accelerating one side should have turned the ship. It did, but unpredictably.

They stared at the instrument panel. Hays said quietly, "There must be some laws here, even if they are strange. Suppose you imagine you have never seen these controls before. Keep your eye on Earth and experiment, see what heads you where."

It was simple. In five minutes he had turned the ship toward Earth. Ten seconds later everything was familiar. Jekka looked into the inspection eyepieces and saw the familiar sight of the four flaring rocket jets.

"Paper thin, by God!" he said. "That layer must be paper thin. Let's try her again."

They tried her again, and again. But thin as the lines of force in that space might be, they turned the rocket ship into an orbit. At last they faced it. They had gone as far as they were equipped to go.

His mind bleak with disappointment, Jekka said, "We'd better go back. We'll need all sorts of things to find out what we're up against. Chemical and magnetic analyzers, perhaps a new mathematics."

Hays said merely, "Let's get them."

They came down out of the sky as smoothly as they had left. Stevens

was long since recovered, now that they were in familiar space, and they set the rocket down on the concrete base as gently as a man lays down an egg.

Jekka came out, favoring his broken arm, now stiff with splints, and an armed guard surrounded them quickly, keeping back any curious persons, protecting the ship. The Lieutenant in charge saluted sharply and said, "The First Lord got your radio and is waiting in his office."

Jekka strode across the ramp, his heart bleak with discouragement. He gave his crew two hours leave, not knowing what the result of his talk with the First Lord would be.

The First Lord rose and greeted him as he came into the sumptuous office. The First Lord shook hands and led him into the planning room, a miniature solar system laid out around them. With him was another man, almost as important as the First Lord.

Jekka recognized the second man as General Malin, Chief of the Terran Bureau of Investigation.

The First Lord said, "You may speak before General Malin. Tell us about it."

He made the tale as brief as he could. The First Lord sat, fingers together, throughout the tale, and his face grew more and more sober.

General Malin, too, seemed less amazed than he should have been. Once or twice he had to hold himself to keep from interrupting. It was as if they had suspected this, as if they had foreknowledge. Jekka found his mind turning this problem even as he gave his report.

When he had finished they sat for a moment, looking at each other, Jekka's disappointment lay sharp as a knife wound within him. The silence became intolerable, and he said, bitterly, "Karson was right when he said I'd never see Mars."

The First Lord looked at him with strange eyes. He said, "This layer of twisted space, could it have been put there? Could it be projected from surrounding planets perhaps, keeping us locked in?"

Jekka stared at them. "After being out there I know nothing is impossible. But the idea seems as wild as Karson's talk about emotional instability being a communicable disease." He glanced about. "Where is Karson, anyhow? He shouldn't miss the chance to say, I told you so."

The First Lord said simply, "Karson has disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

The First Lord nodded at General Malin. "Tell him."

General Malin said quietly. "After his remark at the ship that day we decided to keep an eye on Karson. Not that we suspected him of anything. But he had been working very hard, and we were afraid maybe he was cracking up. Of course we were careful not to let him know he was being watched, but perhaps we were not as careful as we should have been."

"One of our men saw him go home, the evening after you took off. He sat for a while in his garden, and our men watched him till dark from a house farther up the hill. Then he disappeared and we have found no trace of his going."

"No trace?"

"None!"

"And the house was watched?"

"Front and back."

"Have you gone through it?"

"We've taken it apart."

"Impossible," Jekka said.

"Did you see any strange ships in the sky?" the First Lord asked.

"None. Why do you ask?"

General Malin interrupted, "A strange thing occurred in Karson's garden the night you left. About an hour after dark, a bluish-white ball of light rolled across the top of the mountains and floated down this valley. Many people saw it. Finally, it settled into Karson's yard. Our man watched it. He said it looked like a bubble of gas. It gave off no noise.

"Then it rose straight up. My man was suddenly aware that in watching the light he had taken his eyes off Karson. And now Karson was gone. He got in touch with me at once. I radioed the nearest Rocket cruiser and it picked up the light some ten miles south. When he got close, it appeared to be a huge luminous metal ship, shaped like a ball but flat at the poles. He signaled the stranger to stop and got no response. He ran out his weapons and tried to shoot it down. The other ship turned bright like the sun, and soared away from him as if he were standing still. And yet he was in one of the fastest ships in the Rocket Arm."

Jekka stared. The First Lord continued, "Meanwhile we threw a

cordon around Karson's place, but failed to find him."

Jekka asked slowly, "Is that all you know?"

"Not quite. At the same time that the circular object ran away from our rocket ship all the fuses on the base blew out as though they had been subjected to some great overload."

Jekka's face was bloodless. His voice was hushed. "And you believe this to have been a space ship, perhaps from Mars. You believe this sphere of twisted space is a cage, projected from the surrounding planets, as we would cage a dog too vicious to go free?"

General Malin said heavily, "I don't know."

"And Karson," Jekka rushed on. "Karson was trying to tell us. Karson was here to observe if we could cure ourselves before we should see the stars."

General Malin said roughly, "There is no tangible evidence. All we can say is that Karson is gone."

"You can add one word, I think," the First Lord said.

"What do you mean?"

The First Lord looked old and tired. He said, "I'm afraid Karson has gone—*home*."

Almost everyone has experienced some weird or unbelievable adventure. Fantasy Stories magazine wants to publish the best of such stories and will pay \$5.00 for each letter it prints.

The Sunny Side Out

A child's imagination can almost always turn sorrow and disaster into joy. When I was ten years old my sister and I played with the Negro son of our hired-hand on our worn-thin Missouri farm. He was a moon-faced cherub with a wonderful cocoa skin and hair that was a riot of ringlets. At seven, he was the happiest kid in the county. But there came a day when he asked the inevitable question.

"You is white but I is black," he said, tears filling his distressed eyes. "How come I can't be white jes' like you all?"

I fumbled for an answer but my sister shot one back at him that I'll always remember. She said, "You're just as white as anyone. But, honey, you've been turned wrong-side-out."

College of Scientificfictional Knowledge

Conducted by Forrest J. Ackerman

An interesting quiz devised to determine the extent of your familiarity with the terminology of Tomorrow. Have you the vocabulary of a superman, man, subman, or—mouse? Check the word or phrase you believe correctly defines the key word. Answers on Page 128.

- (1) HUMANOID: (a) *an astronomical body*; (b) *a man-like creature*;* (c) *humanitarian*.
- (2) TELEPORTATION: (a) *levity*; (b) *long distance phone call*; (c) *transportation of matter through space without visible means of locomotion*.
- (3) SEMANTICS: (a) *Logarithms*; (b) *the meaning of meaning*; (c) *cybernetics*.
- (4) 6 a's: (a) \$6000; (b) *the force of 6 times the pull of Earth's gravity*; (c) *half a dozen exclamations*.
- (5) NEUTRONIUM: (a) *nutrient food*; (b) *brand new Tromium*; (c) *heaviest conceivable matter*.
- (6) ESPERANTO: (a) *Basic English*; (b) *an imaginary language of the future*; (c) *an actual artificial language in international use today*.
- (7) STEP-ROCKET: (a) *Rocket built in several sections, which jettisons empty portions as the fuel is exhausted*; (b) *Russian rocket (rocket of the steppes)*; (c) *jet-propelled shoe*.
- (8) DIANETICS: (a) *process of producing dyes*; (b) *last stages of diabetes*; (c) *hygienic manipulation of the mind*.
- (9) TIME-MACHINE: (a) *electric clock*; (b) *mechanism to transport persons or things into past or future*; (c) *automobile financed by loan company*.
- (10) ROBOT: (a) *a canal ("ro, ro, ro your bot")*; (b) *a mechanical man*; (c) *Tobor spelled backwards*.
- (11) NULL-A: (a) *Non-Aristotelian logic*; (b) *girl's name ("Wait 'Til the Bells Ring, Null-A")*; (c) *opposite end of the alphabet*.
- (12) ESP: (a) *Entropic Stellar Phenomena*; (b) *Extra-Sensory Perception*; (c) *Eidetic Sound Principle*.
- (13) HEAVYSIDE LAYER: (a) *one who sleeps neither on his back nor stomach*; (b) *the ionosphere, that region of ozone beginning about .65 miles up*; (c) *the belt around the equator*.
- (14) THIOTIMOLINE: (a) *a tincture of rex morphorples*; (b) *subcutaneous, phlogistonc slug*; (c) *a mythical substance which dissolves the moment before it's immersed in aqua pura*.
- (15) RAY-GUN: (a) *by-product of rayon*; (b) *movie star (Ronald Ray-gun)*; (c) *Buck Rogers pistol that shoots destructive beam of light*.
- (16) CYBLRNETICS: (a) *psychoneurotics*; (b) *the science of robotics*; (c) *insane people*.
- (17) SPACE-TIME CONTINUUM: (a) *a movie serial about the universe*; (b) *interplanetary vacuum*; (c) *that which, without it, there'd be no matter existing to chronologically fill up the plenum*.
- (18) DEUTERIUM: (a) *heavy water*; (b) *a deadly drug*; (c) *a poisonous gas*.
- (19) FISSION POLE: (a) *only a fish would bite on this one (sucker)*; (b) *rod which keeps radioactive mass from becoming critical*; (c) *a bar which prevents atomic material from mixing and mushrooming*.
- (20) FLYING SAUCERS: (a) *secret military planes of advanced aeronautical design*; (b) *spaceships scouting from another world*; (c) *mass hallucinations*.

*If your eyes have seen the horror of a
certain secret rite . . .*

You Must Flee Again

By Paul Spencer

Sometimes I think the Fates must have a rather ironical sense of humor. Take the case of the stranger who broke into my home last fall.

It was my housekeeper's night off, poor woman; rain had started at dusk, and she had gone out into the downpour with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. For some time after her departure, I sat alone by the fire, feeling very snug as I listened to the swish and spatter of the rain-drops, driven splashing against the windows by a gale of almost malignant fury. Anyone abroad in that deluge must have been thoroughly miserable. But not necessarily—terrified.

Terrified is exactly what the little man was. My door—unlocked—gave clicking sounds as he frantically tried its knob, rousing me from my reverie. He staggered in and shut the door with careful soundlessness; turning, he faced me as I twisted in my chair to see who had entered. He jumped, but his expression did not change; it remained one of blind, maddened fear.

As I looked him over, I was reminded of a frightened mouse. He was a small, thin fellow—and his tired-looking face was so expressive of helpless misery and terror that it was half tragic and half absurd. He wore no hat, and his hair was sleek with rain; grey locks were clinging damply to his forehead. He trembled—and the night was not that cold. For a long moment, neither of us spoke; he was gasping, apparently from running. Finally he panted, "I beg your pardon—I—may—may I stay here a while?"

Then he staggered to a chair and collapsed into it. I couldn't hold back a scowl; his soaked clothes must be ruining the upholstery. Why hadn't he worn a raincoat? The scowl went unnoticed; his mind seemed to be elsewhere.

He looked up at me timidly. "I know this must seem strange," he gasped. "Dreadful imposition. But I—I got caught in the storm you see."

I returned his gaze coldly. "In that case, what's wrong with my very spacious front porch? Better be honest with me; what are you up to? Police after you?"

He sat looking at me piteously, his gasps gradually quieting.

I stood up. "Well, go ahead. What's your story?"

He gulped miserably. "Oh, I can explain. It's not the police. It's all perfectly—I mean, I—" His gaze fell to the floor, and he regarded the rug for a while in silence. Then he quivered, as though from a sudden chill, and looked sharply at the windows. "Would—would you be good enough to draw the shades?"

I scowled; the request seemed both odd and presumptuous. Nevertheless, I humored him, and pulled down the shades; he relaxed noticeably. With folded arms, I stared down at him severely. "Go ahead," I repeated.

He licked his lips and brushed the damp hair back from his forehead; then he told me his story:

"All this will seem incredible, I suppose, but it's God's truth, sir. I wouldn't be here otherwise. If I were just a—a prowler, say, would I have come in the front door? Well—

"I'm an antique repair man in one of the big galleries in town. I live by myself in a little apartment; a couple of miles from here, it must be. I've never been in any kind of trouble before this; I'm a quiet man, living a routine sort of life—at least, I was.

"Well, I'd been living here uneventfully for almost twenty years. Then something happened that upset my whole existence. Mentally as well as physically.

"One night coming home from work I was pretty deep in thought about one thing or another; so wrapped up in myself that I didn't notice when the bus got to my stop. When I realized what had happened, I was a good mile out of my way. I got off at the next stop. It was a bracing sort of night, so I decided to walk back, rather than take a bus.

"The neighborhood was unfamiliar—I'd never been out that way before. I strolled along rather slowly, giving my surroundings a leisurely

examination. As I walked, dusk fell, and the streetlights came on. The semi-darkness gave the houses around me a somewhat—*erie* look. You see, it was an old section of town, and I suppose most of the residents had moved to more convenient parts of the city. Anyhow, many of the houses were empty, even boarded up. Some of them suggested the 'haunted houses' I remember fearing as a child.

"I wasn't really uneasy, you understand—I'm not a particularly imaginative man; but the atmosphere was there. So it came as something of a shock when, in the long rows of dingy abandoned houses, I saw a thin line of light. It peeped through a crack in the boards over a tightly nailed-up window, in a building that seemed delapidated beyond repair.

"I stopped in front of that window—it gave on the street—and I gazed at it with a good deal of puzzlement. The other windows were boarded so tight I couldn't tell whether there was light in any of the other rooms or not; but this particular window had this small crack in the boards over it, and light gleamed through. As I watched, the crack *blinked* at me. That is, it went dark for an instant, then lit up again. It occurred to me that such a phenomenon might be caused by someone's walking in front of the window, inside. And it seemed odd.

"Now, as I say, I'm not an imaginative man—and not usually inquisitive, either. Still, that light and its blinking—it did it again—set me to thinking the matter over. And it irritated me, because I couldn't quite understand it. What would anyone be doing in a boarded-up old house, and at that hour? Well, I felt I had to know the answer. I looked up and down the street—rather guiltily, I suppose. Then, seeing no one in sight, I entered the house's yard.

"I grabbed the window-ledge with my finger-tips and gave a little jump. I couldn't hold myself up there, but as I bobbed by the crack. I caught a glimpse of part of the room within. As I hit the ground again, I was trembling.

"It wasn't the sort of room you'd expect to find in an abandoned house. Just with that fleeting glimpse, I'd received a distinct impression of immaculate cleanness; not whiteness, but a gleaming, polished *black*. I'd never seen a room with shining black walls before, and somehow—it frightened me. It seemed unnatural, perverse. Moreover, I'd glimpsed part of a human figure, and it was garbed as though for a costume ball. Scarlet with black figurings. Something in the design disturbed me, but

I hadn't been able to get a good look at it; just a swift impression of part of a red-and-black robed back, and shining black walls.

"I stood there in the deepening twilight, shivering, and thinking the matter over. No explanation came to me, but I told myself there could be no justification for the sudden fright that glimpse had given me. There must be some ordinary, common-sense explanation. But in any case, I felt I had to know."

At this point the little man looked around him rather furtively, and gazed with particular intentness at the shaded windows. Then his glance fell to the floor again, and he resumed his narration. I stood leaning against the arm of my chair, and noncommittally regarded my fingernails.

"Well," he went on, "there was a battered old orange-crate lying on the lawn—it was a pretty shabby neighborhood, you see—and I stood it on end under the window and climbed up for a good long look. It was hard to see much through the crack, and I had to fill in with my imagination the half-forms and half-gestures I saw. To this day I can't be sure just what it was I observed.

"There seemed to be only one person in the room, a man of rather unusual height, clothed—as I said—in a crimson robe, with enigmatic designs in black. When I looked this second time, the man was kneeling near the center of the room, and making very curious gestures which I could see only in part. A foot or so beyond the man, something I couldn't see was giving off a weirdly multi-colored smoke which writhed and eddied like a concourse of rainbow-hued snakes. The man seemed to be mumbling to himself, a faint drone which suggested no words in any language I'd ever heard.

"The scene was so utterly bizarre, so unaccountable in terms of human life as I knew it, that I was fascinated, and stayed perched on the box—staring for dear life, and hoping I'd see something which would explain it all. I suppose I would have looked very suspicious to any passer-by; but none came, or at least none disturbed me.

"How long I remained there staring I have no idea. It must have been hours. Very little seemed to happen, at least very little that was even remotely intelligible. The gestures and faint mumbling went on a long while, then ceased, and the colored smoke eddied and whirled for an instant, as though a draft had entered the room. At about this point I

became aware that the red-robed man was not alone in the room as I had thought; there was another man, similarly robed but with black the predominating color, and red that of the designs. There was something strange, almost unhuman, in the posture and movements of this new figure.

"The actions of the two from then on were beyond all relevance to anything I know. They spoke from time to time, but always softly, and the syllables never resolved into any intelligible words. Moreover, the more I watched the less sure I was of the number—and sex—of the people in the room. The fragmentary glimpses I had were most confusing and—disconcerting.

"Finally I noticed that the mumblings of the strange persons were now accompanied by a semi-musical droning which rose and fell as though with the accents of speech; and the single person I now saw stood in profile, silent, in an attitude of respectful listening. A shadow fell upon him. My scalp prickled with a sense of approaching menace; I shifted my weight uneasily on my aching legs. The box creaked, sharply.

"The man in the room turned his head and stared straight into my eyes."

Here, again, the stranger paused. Once more he glanced around, and he moved restlessly in the chair.

"Go on!" I urged, rather severely.

The little man sighed, and continued:

"There was no question but that he saw me—or, rather, saw my eyes at the slit. His faced writhed in a most extraordinary expression—a mingling of utter panic and the most intense and shocking malignancy. He moved, swiftly—and so did I.

"I dropped to the ground, terrified, and ran. I was hardly out of the yard when, glancing back in fright, I saw the whole slab of boards over the window moving outward. It was held by the man in the black-figured scarlet robe, who instantly saw me and shouted something hoarse and unintelligible. The light in the room went out as he spoke.

"All the way to the apartment-house I ran, and I ran up the stairs to my floor, and down the hall to my apartment. Once in the room, panting and covered with sweat, I locked the door and remained standing for a long time, quivering in fear. Finally I relaxed a bit and got up

enough courage to go to bed; but I slept little that night. Or since.

"For it didn't end there. Rather, that glimpse—I of them, and they of me—was only the beginning. The days were getting shorter as autumn came on; when it began to be dusk by the time I got home, I noticed that I would be followed from the bus-stop to my home. Whoever followed did so at a distance, and in shadow, but after the first couple of nights the creature's purpose was plain enough. I was being hunted. Someone wanted to—to get me alone somewhere in the dark, where nobody could see us, and—well, what he would do I preferred not to think.

"I was especially careful, of course, never to go beyond my stop on the bus-line; and it occurred to me before long to take a different route home. At first the prowler, or prowlers, missed me on the new route; but after two nights of freedom, I saw someone dodge into the shadows as I turned to look.

"It was a vague, unnameable menace, but it was terrifying enough. My mind was never easy, and I dreaded the end of each working day. My work suffered, and I was spoken to rather harshly more than once, but how could I explain? I was convinced, you see, that whatever it was I had seen, its perpetrators were resolved that my half-knowledge should never be imparted, and they were out to destroy me. Moreover, I had no idea who—or what—they were, nor whether their normal residence was in that old house, nor whether they dwelt together or separately. I wouldn't be likely to recognize them again, dressed in ordinary clothes. I could know them only by their actions.

"Finally, they struck. One night I tried another new route, through a neighborhood with which I wasn't overly familiar. To my alarm, I found that I had to go through a long, dead-black alley-way to get to my street. Well, I feared going around the old way more than I feared the alley, so I went ahead.

"What a horrible few moments that was! I went through slowly, feeling my way, breathing cautiously, and tensed for I didn't know what. But I got to the other end of the alley, and let out my breath in a great sigh of relief—when something *past which I had walked* struck at me from behind.

"I was walking as the blow fell, and had just quickened my pace; which must be the reason why the blow only grazed the back of my

head. I reeled, momentarily blinded with shock and pain. Then, quite automatically and without conscious thought save pure terror, I recovered my balance and ran madly, spurred by anguish and panic.

"I have no memory of getting back to my room; my mind simply blacked out. All I remember is that as I turned to enter the door of the building, I glimpsed my assailant, not pursuing me at all, but standing—rather oddly hunched, I thought—at the mouth of the alley, motionless. Once safely in my room, I examined the back of my head with the aid of two mirrors, and found that my hair was lightly splashed with blood at the roots, from a series of parallel scratches. These were only superficial, though, and had already stopped bleeding. Still, I looked at those scratches for a long time. My assailant must have used a most extraordinary sort of weapon.

"That was last night. This morning I was afraid to leave my room; but the bright sun finally dispelled the worst of my fears, and I went to work. When it came time to go home, I was dismayed to find the sky so overcast that the evening was completely dark. After a good deal of troubled thought, I decided to take my usual route home, since the walk from the bus-stop was shorter than the walks necessary on the other routes. But I fidgeted a good deal all during the bus-ride.

"As I stepped off the bus, the rain started; and I thought I saw something hiding behind a phone-pole a few yards from me. As the bus drove off, my fear was realized: a dark shape stepped from behind the pole, one arm upraised.

"I turned and ran, blindly, in the first direction that suggested itself. A figure stepped into my path—friend or foe I never found out, for I dodged with panicky swiftness and ran in another direction, ran with hysterical speed, the rain driving hard into my face. My hat flew off, and in confusion I slowed an instant—only to dash on faster than before, when I heard close behind me the quick tread of pursuing feet.

"I twisted and turned, up one street and down another, splashing wildly through puddles, elbowing occasional pedestrians, dodging cars, completely out of my mind with fear. I ran for blocks and blocks—all the pent-up terror of weeks let loose in a blind burst of energy. It was like a nightmare; I had no idea where I was going or why—except to escape my nameless pursuer. The thought of finding a policeman came to me, abruptly, but I was in an out-of-the-way part of the residential

district, and passed few people, including no policemen. Finally, as I ran, out of my mental turmoil came the idea of taking refuge in a house—any house—and I ran to this one.”

He stopped, and looked at me beseechingly. “He—or they—may be lurking outside. I don’t dare to leave. You *must* keep me here, at least until morning! Don’t you see my position? Surely you’ll help me!”

He looked very pathetic as he pleaded. But—

“I’m sorry,” I said evenly, “but I’m afraid you’ve come to the wrong person. It’s hardly strange, of course; there are—quite a few of us.” I flexed my hands, unsheathing my claws.

He had time for just one short scream.

A Young Man Edged in Firelight

I saw what I believed to be a ghost when I was about twelve years of age. I lived with my widowed mother and three sisters on the first floor of a three story apartment house. The landlady had formerly occupied our place but she moved upstairs despite the fact that she was an invalid. None of my family were aware of the real facts concerning our rooms until later. It seems our landlady was responsible for the death of her only son who had fled to sea and drowned.

I was alone one evening, trying vainly to sleep. My mother and sisters were visiting. My bedroom opened on the kitchen and the firelight from our coal stove lit up the threshold. Suddenly the figure of a young man edged in firelight stood framed in my doorway staring in at me. There was something in his mien that literally froze me with terror. His face was so un-alive and there was a searching look about him that was more terrible than all else. Finally, after moments that hung like eternity, he moved away.

I said nothing to my family but I heard later that my mother and sisters too were alarmed by the presence of this uncanny prowler who appeared at odd times during the nights. My mother complained to the landlady and learned the story of the dead son who came back. We moved as soon as possible. I heard that the apartment was rented time and again but always with similar complaints until the death of the landlady which brought a cessation of all the strange prowlings.

Contributed by J. W. Daley

This is a True Fantasy Letter. Everyone has experienced some weird adventure. FANTASY STORIES will pay \$5.00 for each true fantasy letter it prints.

She lay at death's door, this wonderful old
matriarch, but even then she was invincible

THE VENGEFUL PEARLS OF MADAME PODAIRE

BY ROBERT ARTHUR

You ask me for a tale of witchcraft, *m'sieu*. I shall tell you a tale, but what should I, a simple jeweler, know of witchcraft?

It is true I have lived many years of my life here in Haiti. It is true many gems have passed through my hands, and that I have seen the aura of lust which clings to a great jewel like a palpable mist.

And examining beneath my glass a bit of colored rock from Nature's bowels, I have read on its glittering surface its violent history, have viewed the ghosts that hover about it—

But that is not witchcraft. And this is not a story of what I have read through my old eyepiece. Though it is true it concerns gems—pearls they were, great loops of pearls that shimmered and shone in a hundred iridescent colors as they wound themselves about the scrawny neck of Madame Podaire.

There were those who said, upon seeing them clustered about her withered and shrunken throat, that they looked like a multitude of slender snakes coiling.

As to that, I do not know. To me they always looked like pearls. But of course, I am a jeweler.

This, then, is the tale of Madame Podaire and her pearls . . .

Madame Podaire, *m'sieu*, was ancient. The woman who coveted her pearls was young. And beautiful, like a rose dew-wet in the dawn. To gain the gems, even murder was not beyond her.

And— But, *tiens!* I am beginning my tale in the middle. Let us return to the beginning. To Madame Podaire herself.

Madame Podaire, you understand, is dead. Twenty years ago she died. Her pearls? Where are they now? *M'sieu*, you must not hurry me. That will come in due time. As will Nanine North, and the fate that

befell her. Let me walk my own path, and you shall be enlightened.

Eh bien!

Madame Podaire, you must know, was a woman of importance. For she ruled the house of Podaire, and the Podaires have been powerful in Haiti since just after the time of Christophe.

French, yes. The first Jacques Podaire, of noble blood, came to Haiti as a youth. His parents—they died in the French Revolution, *m'sieu*. The name—he chose it for himself, and let his old name die. In Haiti, blood-drenched and torn by savagery, he set out to make his fortune.

Jacques Podaire was a strong man, *m'sieu*. He was large, and dark, and his eyes flashed. He knew how to make a friend, and how to crush an enemy. Through uprising and rebellion and death he flourished, and at the age of fifty he felt secure enough to take a wife, that his name might be propagated.

To France he returned to find her, and brought back with him Madame Podaire, of whom I speak.

Now this is curious, *m'sieu*, that Madame Podaire was the grandchild of a family wiped out by the blacks in the uprising of Toussaint L'Ouverture, save for the infant son who was safely carried to France by one who survived. Thus she was of Haiti also, and was but returning to her own land, as she herself said.

It was whispered that in her veins ran some of the blood of Africa, which all of us now bear, *m'sieu*; and though of that I cannot know, it is true that she was accepted by all as one who belonged and was of Haiti.

She was a young woman when she came. Twenty, perhaps. It is hard to know. When I was a youth, there were those living who had seen her the day she stepped off the Podaire schooner with her husband. And they said she was a creature radiant with vitality, until to be in her presence was to drink from a sparkling spring of youth.

But she was not beautiful. No. Almost was she plain, in fact. Except for her hands.

That a hand can be beautiful, *m'sieu*, you know. That it can possess a life, almost I said an individuality of its own, is a thing you may doubt. Yet it is so.

And such were the hands of Madame Podaire. Long and slender the fingers were, tapering to the tips, and the palms were firm and narrow,

the whole so in proportion that the great Cellini himself might have modeled them and made no change to achieve perfection.

And in them there was power.

Yes, *m'sieu*. One had but to hear Madame Podaire at the piano to glimpse the strength that hid itself beneath the mask of beauty. And—well . . .

There was a gallant who, during the absence of her husband on business during the early days of her marriage, became emboldened. He sought to trap her into a false position in which, rather than let the world know and misjudge her, she would yield to his wishes. You comprehend?

His body was discovered with the dawn, lying within a grove many mile away. A sacred grove of the natives. He had been choked to death. The bruises on his throat were long and narrow. As if to fit slender fingers in which lay the strength of steel.

At least, such is the story that was told in whispers, lest it reach the ears of *M'sieu* Podaire on his return.

But let me skim briefly through the years. Ninety years since that was, when Jacques Podaire brought back from France his bride. Within the year their son was born. Him they named after his father.

And within the next year, the boy's father was dead.

It was a crushing blow to a young woman, married but two years, to be left alone in a land where the gods whispered along the trails at night, and bloodshed and death were the normal order of life.

But she was a woman, was Madame Podaire, with a strength of will to equal that of her strange hands. She took charge herself of the plantation her husband had built up, and for her son she made it increase and multiply.

Coffee beans, sugar, mahogany, redwood, *lignum vitae*—all these her lands produced, and all these she saw harvested and shipped off to France to swell the Podaire coffers.

And though many would have married her, she did not again take a husband. The only man in her life was her son, a tall, straight, dark-haired, laughing boy who grew to manhood knowing every tree and every yard of ground upon his plantations and then at his maturity was sent back to France to complete his education.

And to bring back with him a bride.

In due course he returned, with a wife—a fair girl, of good family, whom Madame Podaire received to her bosom and prepared to train to take her place.

But alas, *m'sieu*! The whims of fortune take small account of human plans. Scarcely had the grandson been born when fever from the jungle struck down both the young husband and his bride. They were buried on a headland overlooking the sea, where the first Jacques Podaire already lay.

And Madame Podaire began again to rear a child to whom some day she might relinquish the great estate that now stretched across the hills behind Port-au-Prince.

As his father had, Jacques Podaire grew to manhood. He took more after his mother, this one did, being slight and fair. But the iron of his forefathers' blood was in him. The wife he took in France and brought back was a woman calm and quiet, but with depths of strength within her that won an old woman's heart.

For Madame Podaire was old even then, *m'sieu*. In '50 she had come. And now the century was about to turn. For fifty years she had guided the house of Podaire unerringly through revolution, uprising, dictatorship, and death.

So that when her great-grandson was born, in the big house to which fifty years before she had come as a bride, Madame Podaire gave a little sigh of thanksgiving. Soon now she would be able to lay down her burdens.

It was not to be. The great-grandson, Jacques, a boy already lithe and stalwart, dark-eyed and dark-haired, was but five when his parents died. Of the cholera, which killed many. They too were buried above the sea, and once again Madame Podaire took up the task it seemed fated she might not lay down.

Under her guardianship, the boy Jacques grew to manhood as his

GET THE FICTION HABIT!

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father and grandfather had done before him, dark and handsome. Upon him she lavished a love that was fiercely protecting and determined. Of all that life had to offer, only the best was to be for him.

Steward she had been to the Podaire fortune, and still it was a thing to command respect. It was to be his. And to share it, to rear a son in turn to continue it, the wife he chose must be among woman what a great pearl, shimmering pure white with the finest orient, is among gems.

When he had married, when his son was born—then, said Madame Podaire, she would resign herself into the arms of her fathers, and join her husband's dust above the darkling waters of the sea. For she was ancient now, withered as parchment, her large head on its pipestem neck almost grotesque in its ugliness.

Only her eyes still had in them the fire of life—her eyes and her hands. For this is the truth. Though Madame Podaire had grown old, her hands had not.

Now, *m'sieu*, I am not trying to tell you that the hands of Madame Podaire were white and strong and slender as they had been when she was but a bride. They were not. The knuckles had enlarged, the skin grown wrinkled.

But still they were white, still long and slender, still alive with restless strength. It was as if in them resided all the vital force left within Madame Podaire.

Madame Podaire now seldom left her great wicker chair, in which she spent her waking hours.

On rare occasions her majordomo, a black giant named Christophe after the king said to have been his ancestor, helped her into a pony cart and she was driven with the boy Jacques slowly about the plantation.

But for the most part she sat, her strong hands dealing with papers and documents, casting up accounts, or perhaps just sewing, in their activity seeming to be almost independent of her shrunken, motionless body.

And, *m'sieu*, as she was at that time, Madame Podaire stayed. The grand-daughters of women who had been her friends were dead now, but not she. There were whispers that she would live forever, changing

no iota. That death, denied her, had long since gone his way and would not return.

There was another story also, *m'sieu*. More widely told. And believed, as well. That Madame Podaire would die when her hands died. And until then, she would live.

Eh, *m'sieu*, this is a superstitious land! One must remember that. But such was the story. That Madame Podaire would not die until her hands died.

And that, *m'sieu*, is Madame Podaire. . . . The pearls? But yes, I am coming to them now. I beg you to let me march at my own speed. I will become confused otherwise. So as to the pearls—

Pearls, you comprehend, were madame's bridal gift from the first Jacques Podaire. A great matched rope of them, true spheres every one, perfect in size and shape, perfect in sheen and orient, culminating in a single globe of iridescent beauty as large, beyond exaggeration, as the glass marbles which *les petits* play with in the streets of your own country.

I have never seen a finer string. It was hopeless to better it. And Madame Podaire, who permitted herself only one indulgence through all those years—that, the collecting of pearls for her adornment—did not try to better it.

Instead, from the beginning she sought to acquire pearls that were obviously imperfect. Let me explain.

You have never studied the science of precious stones, *m'sieu*? Then perhaps you do not know a misshapen pearl is called a baroque. These baroques, due to the fact they have been formed about odd-shaped fragments of wood or stone or other matter, lack either of the two shapes required of the finest pearls: the spherical, or the pear shape.

They may be long and thin, almost square, skull-shaped—ah, *m'sieu*, madame had one just that shape, as large as the nail of your middle finger—or otherwise formed. You follow.

Also, they may be of any color.

The true pearl, the queen of gems, is of a delicate white translucence. But her less favored sisters may be yellow, black—though the true black, perfect in shape, is very rare and valuable—greenish, reddish, rusty, streaked. And it was madame's fancy to collect colored baroques.

These, you understand, are far less expensive than the perfect pearls, and one might acquire several goodly strings without too great an expenditure of the world's goods.

Knowing of madame's passion, skippers of trading ships brought specimens for her. From Paris merchants who dealt with the house of Podaire sent others, sometimes as goodwill gifts. Over the years they grew in number and variety until, at the end of madame's days, she had a necklace of three great strings of pearls curiously shaped and colored as no other necklace ever assembled.

Madame was not a vain woman. But as the years stole away her youth, she used her pearls to adorn herself and hide from the eye her shrunken neck and scrawny bosom and wasted flesh, the degradations of the body that time imposes.

String by string she wound her pearls about her throat, letting them lie over her bosom, twining them one about the other, until all of her throat was hidden beneath the layers of gems.

As I said—you remember, *m'sieu*?—there were those who whispered that the strange, grotesque baroques madame had collected were like long skinny snakes winding and twisting about her throat, their varied colors glittering with the strange sheen of a serpent's scales. But to me they were merely pearls.

When attired in state for great occasions, such as her great-grandson Jacques' birthday, when the house of Podaire was thrown open to the elite of Port-au-Prince—who crowded, you may be sure, to be present—madame would sit, all her pearls wound about her neck, her bright eyes surveying everything from beneath half closed lids, her strong hands touching, lifting, or stroking the gems that were to her like living companions.

And there were those who insisted that madame's pearls *did* live. That each one knew her touch and understood her voice. That in them was a tiny spark of life which made them lustrous beyond ordinary pearls.

M'sieu, it is true that on madame pearls thrived. Pearls are curiously close to life, it cannot be denied. For some they will sicken and die, lose luster, become but spherical bits of matter without beauty or value. For others they will bloom like the rose, taking on new sheen, new loveliness.

And madame was one of these last. It is beyond disputing, that about her neck pearls shone as pearls rarely do. It was thus easy for the superstitious to believe that in them was a spark of life which knew her, and responded to her.

The last public occasion upon which Madame Podaire wore her gems was her great-grandson's twentieth birthday. Jacques was then a man, tall, dark, handsome with a strength and fire that caused all women's heads to turn as he passed, their eyes to follow as he departed. In a short time he was to sail for Paris, to complete his education and to find a wife.

Which brings me to—

Yes, *m'sieu*, to Nanine North.

You will forgive an old man's refusal to be hurried. But it was important that you should understand all: about Madame Podaire, about her pearls, her great love and great ambitions for her son's son's son, Jacques, and finally about the girl, Nanine North.

Nanine North was a guest at that twentieth birthday party of Jacques Podaire's.

She was a girl from the States, you will understand. A small pink-and-white girl with golden hair, an oval face of a beauty the angels might envy, red lips, eyes blue as heaven's azure, teeth tiny and almost of a color to match the white pearls of Madame's great string.

From the South of your country she came. Her voice was low and warm. Her eyes said things her words disclaimed. There were few men who could refuse her any request when she smiled.

But within, she was rotten.

That Madame Podaire saw with one searching glance when Jacques brought her over to introduce her. And the heart of Madame Podaire was sick within her, for already she could see the light of infatuation in the boy's eyes.

For a brief moment Nanine North's gaze rested on the ancient woman, as her lips automatically spoke soft words. Then she was swept away onto the dance floor in the boy's eager arms. But in that moment her eyes had seen, her soul drunken in, Madame Podaire's pearls, wound string upon string upon her withered neck.

It was while they danced that Jacques told Nanine North that the

pearls of his great-grandmother were to be his bride's. The baroques, the colored pearls, were to come to her bridal eve. The white string when the old one died. And the soul of Nanine North burned hot with greed.

Jacques Podaire was young and handsome. His estate was large. And the strings of pearls that the great-grandmother wore were to be his bride's. Many a woman has sold her soul for less. In that ten minutes after meeting Jacques Podaire, Nanine North had decided that he was to marry her.

As Madame Podaire had discerned in a single glance, Nanine North was bad inside. In her soul was nothing but an appetite for the expensive luxuries of the world. And though she looked soft and lovely, in truth she was hard and determined and clever.

She had come to Haiti on a cruise ship, to spend a few weeks with a former friend whose husband was of the Marines then stationed in our country to keep order. But the weeks stretched into months, and Nanine North did not leave.

Daily did Jacques Podaire call to see her. To every ball, party, or concert she went in his company. His escort enabled her to enter the society of Port-au-Prince as no outsider otherwise could have.

And though there were those who guessed she looked upon us with contempt—for in truth, as I have said, most of us bear the blood of Africa in our veins—there was naught she did to reveal it.

Through the months Madame Podaire, sitting in her great wicker chair, her hands moving restlessly in her lap, kept her silence.

There was naught she could do to interfere, though well she knew that if the fire in young Jacques' veins for the soft, white, golden beauty of Nanine North did not burn itself out, as such things sometimes do, all her fierce hopes for his happiness would fail, and all her long years of effort be undone.

For there are women who, once they have a man within their grasp, suck him dry of all that is in his mind and soul, until he is but a twisted, bitter husk. Unless he is wise and kills in time the woman who holds him enmeshed in her skein of infatuation. And of these women Nanine North was one.

But this is something that a woman may know, but a man can only learn. Madame Podaire kept her silence, though at times her strong

white hands in her lap closed curiously, as if squeezing between them something round and soft.

And then the day came when Jacques approached her and announced that he would marry Nanine.

Madame Podaire uttered no word of censure, no word of discouragement, no word of forbiddance. For a moment her hands clenched, as they had done before, then she spoke.

"You are a man, my son, and you must make your own decisions," she said, in a voice made harsh by time. "I ask only that you wait until your twenty-first birthday."

To this Jacques agreed gladly; and though Nanine North was vexed that six months more must elapse before she would safely be Mrs. Jacques Podaire, she knew that she had won, and her soul sang with greedy triumph. Tinged only by a little fear, fear of Madame Podaire.

For the ancient one was a woman, and Nanine North knew that to her, the motives of Nanine North were not secret. But what could an old one, who must die soon in the natural course of events, do to one as young and lovely and clever as Nanine North? Nothing. Veritably, nothing.

Still, there was always the possibility—

Did not the whispered tales tell that in Madame Podaire's blood ran a strain linking her to the dark and savage ones who practiced the dread and secret rites of voodoo? And was it not said that, the strange, shriveled woman with the curious, powerful hands would live forever, as long as her hands retained their strength? That she would not die until her hands did?

So Nanine North must have thought. And thinking, made certain cautious inquiries. . . .

While Madame Podaire in turn was thinking too—the mind of an old woman pitted against the mind of a young one, with a man the stake of the contest. A man whom the one would have done murder to snare, and the other with equal readiness would have dealt death to save.

But Madame Podaire could not kill Nanine North. Though there were ways. . . . But she could not use them, for had aught happened to the girl while Jacques' eyes were blinded by her beauty, he would rightly have put the blame upon his ancestor. And forever after been haunted by the spectre of hatred for the one who had loved him, as well

as by the unreal and beautiful memory of one who would always come between him and happiness.

There must be some way, though, to free him from the spell the girl had wrought upon him. Some way—

But before she had found it, Madame Podaire's hands began to diel

I see you are startled, *m'sieu*. Yet I said only what I mean. Madame Podaire's hands began to die.

You will recall the tale that was whispered of those hands—a tale that of a surety had come to the ears of Nanine North. Now no one knows the truth, but it is certain that the girl would have been glad for the old one to die, that the last possible obstacle between her and the goal she had set herself should be removed.

And it is well known that the uncle of a servant of the friend with whom Nanine North stayed was a powerful *papaloi*, a renegade man of voodoo wanted by the constabulary for the poison murder of certain enemies. A man of wide and unholy knowledge. It is possible that through him she might have obtained—

Well, that is but guesswork, *m'sieu*. All that is known, however, is that one morning as Madame Podaire sat sewing, the needle flashing in her fingers, a pin that had no business being in the material at all, scratched her finger.

A few moments before Nanine North had bent above her, about to depart with Jacques for a ride on horseback. Had smiled and greeted her as Jacques' affianced wife should. And might at the same time, perhaps, have slipped the pin—

Again, conjecture, *m'sieu*. Let me state the facts baldly. Madame thought nothing of the scratch, her mind being busily engaged upon other things. She withdrew the pin and cast it aside.

Her finger gave her no pain for three days. On the third day it was slightly swollen, and purplish in color. The swelling spread to her whole hand and wrist; and strangely, as if in sympathy, her other hand likewise became swollen and discolored.

A doctor was called, and diagnosed blood-poison. Treatment was given, and the swelling began to go down.

But, *m'sieu*, when the swelling had vanished, madame's hands continued to shivel!

Within a fortnight they were the claws of an ancient crone. Then they became numb, as if the blood were not flowing. The physician was puzzled.

Another man of medicine was called. He found the strength gone from both hands, that had been so strong. Dark and twisted, like the roots of a mighty tree, fallen now, they lay in madame's lap, and she could barely move them.

Those hands that once, it may be, had choked to death a strong and passionate man!

And then, *m'sieu*, the tips of the fingers turned quite black, and the flesh began to rot, to drop away.

Gangrene. . . .

Nothing then would save Madame Podaire's life except the removal of her diseased, dead hands. It was too late for other help from medicine or from magic, though Christophe had gone into the hills to return with a shriveled one who was a witch doctor known and feared throughout Haiti.

Jacques had expected his great-grandmother to cry out when the decision of the doctors was made known to her. But she did not. In silence she bowed her head.

"Tomorrow, my son," she said at last, her voice but a faint, dry whisper. "Tomorrow it shall be done. Tonight I shall tend to something that must be done now, lest I not return alive to this house again."

And with that Jacques and the doctors were forced to be content. That night Madame Podaire lay closeted in her bedroom, and with her there was only the curious one who had come down from the hills to help her.

What went on there cannot be guessed. Only this is known. That that night for the last time Madame Podaire wore her necklace of baroque pearls; and in the morning, when the light of dawn came down across the hills, the *papaloi* whom Christophe had fetched was gone.

That day, in the Marine Hospital, Madame Podaire's hands were removed at the wrist. Before the deed was done Madame Podaire had made a curious request. This was acceded to. Afterwards the old one was returned to her home in an ambulance, and a curious package went with her.

She should have remained in the hospital, the physicians told her, but

she would not.

She was dying, said Madame Podaire, and she must die in her own home.

It was obvious that what she said was true. All Haiti knew it. The drums beat in the hills that night, and each night thereafter until she died, making powerful magic for her soul. A queer, hushed atmosphere hung about the house of Podaire, and in empty rooms shadows seemed to move and gather.

While in her bed Madame Podaire lay dying, slowly, with dignity, as a great pine on the verge of falling totters for a moment but holds itself poised erect until it goes down with a great crash.

Her first action was to send for me. Yes, *m'sieu*, for Pierre, the jeweler who had supplied so many of her precious pearls. Who had restrung them often through the years.

And to me she gave the necklace of baroques. I must restrung them for their next owner, and she was quite explicit in her instructions. I was startled at what she wished me to do; but agreed, because it was she who asked it.

It was a queer request, but one I could fulfill, and, having promised, would.

"You shall take from the necklace a pearl, Pierre," madame said then. "Any one you desire. It is not a fee. It is a gift. Something by which one who has been a friend may remember me."

As if one needed a gift to remember Madame Podaire! But I took the pearl of my choice, as she directed. I have it still. Presently I shall show it to you.

And I left, taking with me the necklace and a curious package which I did not open until safely locked within my shop. Then I did as she had instructed, though it was not an easy task, and one which, had I not sworn so solemnly, I would gladly have relinquished uncompleted.

My work took me some days, and during these days madame clung to life with a will that would not let it go. Verily, it was the strength of her mind that compelled Death to cool his heels while he waited for her to be ready. And she was not ready until I had returned her pearls.

Then she called to her great-grandson, Jacques, and Nanine North, and I was a witness to what followed.

Lying in her bed like a withered seed pod almost lost in the white

counterpane, madame's bandaged wrists were exposed upon the coverlet. Over them lay the great necklace of baroques, and beside it the string of white pearls glowed.

"My child," Madame Podaire said to Nanine North then, and lifted her arms a few inches, so that the string of colored pearls came with them, "as I long ago promised, these are to be my gift to Jacques' bride. I shall not live to see him wed, so these gems that have been mine I am giving to you now. They are yours."

With a little cry, for a moment forgetting herself, Nanine North snatched up the necklace and exultantly felt the weight of it, letting the strings of precious beads drape down over her arms and onto her bosom. For an instant Madame Podaire watched her. Then she nodded toward the second necklace.

"Jacques," she said, in a firmer voice, "these pearls that were my bridal gift I bequeath to you, that you in turn may make a gift of them to your bride. When you are wed, my son, you shall present them to your wife. Until then, you must guard them and let no other touch them."

Disappointment crossed Nanine North's features like a cloud, for she had perhaps imagined that both necklaces were to be given to her then. But she smiled and dissembled, and said, in her soft, warm voice, that Madame Podaire must stop jesting with them that she was to die.

Madame Podaire shook her head.

"I do not jest," she replied. "And there is one thing more I must say. You must not wear your gift until your wedding eve. Evil will befall you if you disregard me. And you must never place them about your neck if within your heart or mind there is anything of deception. Only you can judge yourself.

"But take care! For *if*, unworthy, you array yourself in these gems, you shall never remove them from your throat."

For a moment Nanine North paled and licked her lips. She was aware of Jacques looking at her, and she summoned a smile.

"I have no fear, *grandmère*," she answered. "I shall be very careful to obey you, and to keep my gift safe until—"

But she did not finish. For Madame Podaire had closed her eyes, and gone with death in that moment.

And now, *m'sieu*, my story approaches its conclusion. There is only

a little more to tell. On that day of mourning, Jacques Podaire's place was at the side of his great-grandmother.

Nanine North returned to her friend's home, and to her room. It was not fitting that she appear in public. But she did not mind that on this day of her triumph. For the pearls of Madame Podaire were hers, and the knowledge was like wine.

In her room she weighed them in her fingers, and exulted. She caressed them, and laid her cheek against them, and felt the smooth warmth of their surfaces against her skin.

And at last could not resist placing them about her throat, just for a moment, just to see how she would look.

Suited action to thought, Nanine North lifted the pearls and placed them about her neck, closed the clasp, and took away her hands to view her image in the glass.

What followed, *m'sieu*, I tell as it was told by the mulatto girl who was her maid.

For a moment, the pearls lay quiet on her bosom, glowing with an almost eerie brilliance in a dozen lights and colors. Nanine North turned this way and that, admiring herself. Then a strange thing happened.

Each pearl on the three strands seemed to move, to twist a little, like a thing alive. Nanine North felt the motion, like countless tiny fingers on her throat, and was startled into motionlessness.

And then the loops of pearls began to move visibly. They began to twist and writhe like slender serpents. To constrict and to tighten.

Nanine screamed. Horribly. She dug her fingers into the hard mass of gems that were knotting themselves into a great, garroting collar.

She could not loose them. The pearls she touched twisted out of her fingers. She could not force her hands into them, to pull them away. Her very efforts to free herself seemed to pull them tighter.

She screamed again, a choked gasping cry of animal terror. She tried to run. She stumbled down the hall and gained the threshold of her friend's room. There she fell, face convulsed, eyes bulging.

For a moment she threshed about, still clawing at the pearls about her throat. Then she lay still.

When the Marine doctor reached there, summoned hastily, the pearls lay around her throat in a loosely knotted mass, much tangled and

intertwined, but not at all tight enough to harm. Yet she was dead.

And on her white throat were deep purple marks. As if made by choking fingers, *m'sieu*.

And this is a strange thing. All the lustre had gone from those pearls.

Eh, bien! There's something more to tell you, *m'sieu*. The Marine doctor, upon hearing of Madame Podaire's warning, shook his head.

Fear had choked Nanine North, he stated. As she remembered the old one's warning, the sense of guilt had caused her throat to constrict. The choking sensation had frightened her more. In her panic she had twisted the necklace tight about her neck.

And Jacques Podaire, staring down into her contorted face, so unlovely now, but nodded and said nothing.

She was buried, after Madame Podaire had been laid to rest beside her husband's dust, in a churchyard, decently but without emotion. The pearls remained around her neck.

Shortly thereafter Jacques Podaire sailed for Paris, where presently he married, quite happily, making to his wife a gift of the perfect pearls.

That is the tale, *m'sieu*. And there is the pearl that I have to remind me of it. It is oddly shaped, is it not? Long, like a slender white hand.

Eh, what have I omitted to tell you? Not much, *m'sieu*. But a simple thing. The instructions that madame gave me, when she gave me the baroque necklace to restring.

You see, in the package she brought back from the hospital that day were her hands, placed in a preservative. The package that I carried with me when I left was that package.

Her instructions were that I should take her hands, and do certain things to the strong tendons of the fingers. Prepare them, *m'sieu*, according to a secret formula she gave to me.

And then, *m'sieu*, when I had prepared those cords in which had lain the strength of her lovely hands, I was to knot them together and on them string the pearls.

Yes, *m'sieu*, it is quite true. Those were her instructions, and they were faithfully carried out. So that night, when Nanine North in wilful disobedience of her promise, and against Madame Podaire's warning, placed the pearls about her neck she was also, one might say, placing there the dead hands of Madame Podaire.

It is not a thought one cares to dwell upon, is it, *m'sieu*?

What's wrong with a man when he speaks and no one hears, when he returns to his home and finds his place taken by others?

Both Feet In Eternity

By Robert W. Sneddon

The man walking along the road stopped suddenly. "Hello!" he said aloud. "What the dickens!" He stared about him in bewildered fashion as he took in his surroundings—the tree-lined road which rolled in front of him, the neat little suburban houses, the distant prospects of the hills.

"It's funny. Here I am on the way to John's," he mused; "and yet, darn it all, I never thought it possible I could get on a train, get off it, and start walking without any recollection of it. What on earth could I have been thinking of? That's what the human brain can do. I've been working too hard. Maybe I'd best lay off a bit."

He sat down on a low stone wall and began to laugh softly..

"Certainly is the craziest business. I remember leaving the office. Old Welsh was still playing with his books. I believe he's sorry when twelve o'clock comes Saturday and he can't juggle figures till Monday morning again. I came down and went back up again to get some papers. It was snowing, and I tried to get on a bus. The thing was full, so I stood aside, and then another one came up, and I stepped out and slipped. It's a wonder the bus didn't go over me."

He got up. "Oh, what's the use? I was worrying about that Sprague case, and forgot what I was doing. Only thing I can't understand is—where's the snow? And it's warm here—warm as a summer's day. Must be getting on."

Fumbling in his pocket, he pulled out his watch.

"Just like the old timepiece. Stopped. Half past twelve—just after I left the office. Here's an automobile coming. Say, what's the time, old man?"

The automobile sped past, its driver staring ahead of him.

"Well, I'll be— Struck a deaf one."

Grumbling, he walked on a little farther, then turned swiftly as he heard the approach of another car.

Stepping a little to one side, he held up his hand.

"I'll get it from this bird," he told himself grimly.

As the car came up, with a thin-faced man in goggles at the wheel, the man on the road let out a shout.

"What's the time, brother?"

It seemed to him that for a moment the man at the wheel gave a start, then without other sign of having heard the query, stepped on the gas so that the car leaped forward, just grazing the indignant pedestrian.

"What's the idea? Want to kill me?" the latter shouted, shaking his fist at the cloud of dust. "People have no time to be civil to you nowadays. Well, I don't suppose it matters. I'll walk in on John and give him a surprise. I hope to heavens he hasn't gone off to the links."

As he neared the trim house with its patch of lawn, a small boy on a scooter shot toward him.

"Got an alarm clock, son?" he asked whimsically. "If you have, maybe you can tell what time it is. My watch has stopped work for the day."

The boy put one foot down sharply on the road and checked his progress with a startled look, then as if remembering some injunction pulled out an old watch attached to a string, looked at it, then slung it back into his pocket with a twirl of the wrist, and, without a word, wheeled the scooter round. Shoving off with his active foot, he was almost out of earshot before William Hopkins found words.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" he growled. "What's wrong with the people here? I never met such a bunch of close-mouths. Might as well be a foreign country for all the answer they'll give you. Even the kids are dumb as oysters. How can John stand them? If I lived here I'd go crazy in a week. Why, the people in the suburbs don't know they're alive."

He walked up the concrete path, and was about to put his hand up to the shining brass knocker when he noticed the French window of the living room was open. He stepped to it and looked inside.

"Hello, John!" he cried cheerfully; and the man inside standing by

the heavy table turned slowly and smiled.

With a step he was at the window, holding out his hand.

"Bill! This is great! I had a hunch you might come out today. Come in, man."

William Hopkins shook his friend's hand warmly and stepped in over the low sill. "Just took it into my head to run out and see you. I haven't been here for a coon's age, John. But I said to myself, certainly must look up the boy; and here I am. Say, I'm glad to see you, John."

"Same here. It's been quite a time since we saw each other, Bill. You're looking much the same."

"Can't complain. I feel as young as I ever did, and I don't see you've changed any these past two years."

"No," John smiled with a faintly amused twinkle in his eyes; "I guess I'm pretty much now as I always look. But how are things with you?"

"Pretty good—pretty good, John. Plugging along in the same old way."

"Same old way, eh?" John echoed.

"Of course. That seems to tickle you. How's business?"

"Business?" said John with an air of surprise. "I thought you knew I retired some time ago."

"News to me, John. You don't say! Lucky dog—nothing to do but cut your coupons, and golf every day in the week if you want to. Well, well, you do surprise me. You were always such an active cuss."

"Oh, I'm not idle. I try to help the other fellow along a bit."

"Charity, eh?"

"Well—no. I don't like the word, Bill. I mean just doing what I can, in a friendly way, for anyone that needs a bit of boosting."

"Well, I never thought you'd quit business."

"Got to make room for the young ones, Bill."

"Young ones! That's a good one, John. Why, let me see—you're only thirty-eight, aren't you? And you look thirty. Where do you get this old age stuff? I can't say I feel a day older."

"No, I don't suppose you do, Bill. It's a wonderful sensation."

"You bet it is. By George, last time I saw you, you were a pretty sick man, though, John. I never thought you'd win through, but you certainly cheated the doctors. You had them scared, and me, too. I tell you

when I left you lying there to go back to town, I thought it was good-bye, forever. But it just proves you can't kill a good man. You're good for a century yet."

"Why not for eternity? Might as well say that," replied John, still with the same faint smile.

"Eh—what's that?" William Hopkins threw back his head and let out a bellow of laughter. "Of course. Why not—the way science is progressing? Live forever, eh—that's the motto. Well, well, you certainly are the same merry old cuss, and it does me a world of good to see you. Don't know why, but I felt kind of blue coming along. No reason—kind of off color, you know. Too much work in the office. Or maybe it was your crazy people round here. What's got into them? You ask them a civil question, and you might as well be speaking to the air. Never a word out of them."

"They didn't hear you, of course."

"Aw, what's wrong with them? All got ear trouble? I speak loud enough for them to hear, don't I?"

"Yes, I can hear you."

"Well, what's the trouble, John?"

"They didn't see you."

"Didn't see me? Great heavens! I stood right in front of one bird with a buzz wagon and flagged him to ask what time it was, and he shot past me like a wooden sign post."

"Oh, you'll get used to things like that. You'll learn not to worry about trifles."

"Trifles! And see here—what kind of kids have you got here? I asked a kid on a scooter what the time was—my watch had stopped—and what does he do but shoot off without a peep out of his chest. I tell you, if a foreigner was dumped down here he'd think he'd struck a bunch of dummies or lunatics. Well, maybe not that, but people that hadn't an ounce of manners. This would be a gold mine for a salesman with the Book of Etiquette. Oh, excuse me—I didn't hear your friend come in."

He stopped awkwardly as a middle-aged man in a tweed suit sauntered into the room, went to the table, and, taking a cigar from the humidor on it, lit it carefully, looked at the match, then, going to the window, threw out the match end and stood looking out into the garden.

"Who's your loquacious friend?" asked Hopkins in a stage whisper.

"Oh, he lives here," answered John in his natural tone.

"Oh, he does?" A puzzled expression flickered across Hopkins's face.

"Don't appear to bother his head very much about us."

"No."

"Deaf—like the rest of the neighbors?"

"You needn't whisper, old man; he can't hear us."

"Another of them. I'd think you'd be scared to live here."

"Nothing scares me now."

"No! I guess you're used to it, but I don't quite get the hang of things. You mean this fellow lives in your house?"

"Yes."

"Does he always act like this—as if he didn't notice anything or anybody? He is not blind as well as deaf, is he?"

"No, indeed."

"Well, who is he? He certainly acts like he owned the house."

"He does."

"What! For the love of Pete, how long has he been here, John?"

"Two years."

"And he lets you stay on? What's the big idea? I don't get it."

"He doesn't know I'm here," answered John easily.

"Say, what's the matter with me? He lives here, and doesn't know you're here? Why not? Am I crazy, or what's the matter?"

John came forward and laid his hand on his friend's arm.

"Don't you know yet, Bill?"

"Know what?"

"Know that I'm what those who don't know call dead! I died two years ago."

"Dead!" William Hopkins stared incredulously, then shrank away with an inarticulate murmur. "You—oh, my God—now I remember. But—"

The other held him firmly as he added with a smile, radiant with affection:

"Don't be frightened, Bill. Everything's all right. You are dead, too, old man. Run over by a bus three months ago, and you've just managed to come back to your old friends. It's all right, Bill, absolutely all right."

THE END

Political Fantasy

A New York citizen suffered a sudden appendicitis attack. His doctor advised an immediate operation in a private hospital. The man refused. "I've been paying taxes all my life," he said. "I'll go to the municipal hospital." The doctor said, "You won't like it. Too much red tape. You know how government operates." The citizen replied, "I paid taxes. I want free medical services."

So he went to the hospital. They gave him some forms to fill out. When he had completed the forms, they sent him down a hallway. "Go into the door marked Appendix," he was told.

Later, he told his doctor about it. "I rushed down the hall, suffering like the devil," he said. "I found the door marked Appendix and walked into a room with two other doors, one marked Acute, the other marked Chronic. I went through the Acute door and got into a room with two doors marked Male and Female. I rushed through the Male door and was in a room marked White and Colored. I went through the White door and saw two more doors marked Democrat and Republican. I'd been a good Republican all my life so I went through the Republican door and found myself outside on the street."

Samuel Goldwynisms

They can talk all they want about color television but I won't believe it until I see it in black and white.

The atom bomb is so frightening it makes the hair stand up on the edge of my seat.

Things are so bad today, if Roosevelt were alive he would be turning over in his grave.

We've passed a lot of water under the bridge since World War I.

Not So Fantastic

A very famous woman came to a banquet at the Waldorf Astoria to make a speech. She had a bad cold so she prepared herself by carrying two handkerchiefs, one in her purse and the other tucked into her bosom. In the midst of her speech, her nose began to run. Her purse was out of reach. She paused and ran her hand into her dress front. The kerchief eluded her. Her nose began to drip. Her search became desperate. The eyes of the entire audience were riveted on her. She felt she had to make some explanation. So she said, "I know I had *two* when I came in here."

He defied his Gods, dared their vengeance until
Huitzilopochtli reached across the centuries to
collect an ancient pledge.

Cut Out This Aztec Heart

By Brice Purcell

Where he came from I could not imagine; but there he sat facing me across the lunch table as our ship began to respond to the waves that sparkled and broke outside Havana harbor. He was of average build, dark-skinned but with an underlying pallor that suggested a lack of rich, warm blood.

I was at once fascinated and repelled by him; and I was mystified because I was sure I had seen all the new passengers come aboard.

We had been in port only five hours; and after a brief visit ashore I had returned to the quiet of the deserted steamer. Of course passengers may come aboard early, but it isn't usual; and so I felt when I saw him that his presence was strange.

I had stood near the gangplank for an hour before sailing, watching the antics of an organized tourist group that had gone to see Havana in a two-hour excursion. I had noticed, too, the new passengers, some of them Mexicans returning home. Within the limitations of my amateurish knowledge of ethnology I took delight in studying the individual types as they came aboard. The largest group of Mexicans were Mestizos who, except for designation as Mestizos, defied all analysis. Mix Aztec blood with the blood of any European and you achieve a result that can be neither predicted nor catalogued.

But the total number of new passengers was not great, I saw them all. I saw the gangplank swing to the dock. I stood on deck as we went down the bay and out past Morro Castle. Then, realizing that the luncheon chimes had sounded, I went below.

The chief engineer, at whose table I sat, was on duty. Harriet Manning, of the all-expense tourist party, was at my left. She told me that Georgie West, also of our table and also of the tourist party, had announced she would eat later after watching the Havana skyline retreat. One of the two remaining chairs had been unoccupied

all the way from New York. The occupant of the other had left us at Havana. Thus I was prepared to see one or two new faces at the table; but having watched the newcomers arrive I was not prepared for the sight of the unusual young man who looked up and nodded as I sat down. Nor was I prepared for the strange, clammy chill that went over me when he spoke.

Harriet, who seemed to be paying the stranger more attention than was necessary, introduced us, calling him something that sounded like *Somme*. I never listen to names and was not sure I got his straight. Harriet, impelled by a sense of social responsibility said, "Professor Sears is a great ethnologist. He's going to Mexico to study the Indian races. Aren't you, Pete?"

"I'm going there to study races," I admitted; "but I'm no expert. This is my first assignment. Many thanks for your flattering statements, but there's no use figuring you'll be able to go home and tell how you met a great man. Unless, of course"—I turned toward Mr. *Somme*—"unless Mr. *Somme*—" I broke off, for the fellow was staring at me in a most disconcerting manner. Suddenly he seemed to realize what he was doing and shifted his eyes uneasily.

"Did you say a study of races?" he asked.

"Why yes," I said. "Is that your field?"

"No. Oh no," he said hurriedly. "I just wasn't sure I heard correctly."

"Please understand, I am a rank amateur," I added and turned to the steward who was awaiting my order. I welcomed this momentary respite; for the persistent feeling that this *Somme* had not come up that Havana gangplank somehow made me uncomfortable. My order given. I turned to the bewitching Harriet.

"Have you asked Mr. *Somme* whether he is a good sailor?"

"No, I haven't," said Harriet. "Say, are you, Mr. *Somme*? You see this is the only table that had a full quota of customers, at every meal on the way down from New York. It was rough all the way. But it's not bad now, is it?" Harriet asked this as if she were playing hostess to Mr. *Somme* and felt responsibility for the behavior of both ship and sea.

She had scarcely asked the question when the ship unoblingly rolled badly to starboard. In the moment of confusion that followed, my eye was suddenly attracted by a silent drama that was going on before me. Just before the ship rolled the steward had placed a steak knife beside my plate. It had a silver shaft and a long steel blade.

While I held onto whatever my hands could grasp, that knife got away and slid, point foremost toward Mr. Somme.

The ship's return to an even keel checked the knife's course half-way across the table and I retrieved it, but not before I had seen Mr. Somme's eyes fixed on it in a sort of fascination while the blood seemed to drain entirely from his cheeks. A moment later, to the lasting discredit of our table, he excused himself and left the room.

"Well," I said, turning to Harriet, "our newcomer doesn't like this old ship's roll."

"Oh be still!" said Harriet, impatiently, staring after him. "He can't help it." Then she seemed to shake off some spell that was upon her. "I'm sorry, Pete! I don't know what made me speak so impatiently. It's not your fault if he's seasick."

"And not yours if the honor of the table is lost." We were quiet for a moment, then I added, "He's an odd sort, isn't he? I wonder where he came from?"

"He's from France. He told me so before you came in."

"He doesn't look French. But I really meant when did he come aboard?"

"Why, this morning, of course. We've made only one port since we left New York. Remember?"

"What did you say his name is?"

"Somme, or something like that. I don't know exactly. He is odd, isn't he? But let's forget about Mr. Somme. If he's upset by one good roll we may not see him again."

Sure enough he never entered that saloon again. But Harriet did not forget him. In fact, by the evening of the following day I was genuinely worried; for I knew how rapidly ship-board romances can blossom. There was something about this Somme chap that fascinated Harriet, though I concluded it was more maternal instinct welling up at the sight of a thoroughly miserable young male than anything truly romantic.

For Harriet was not really what is called the romantic type. She was the competent sort, calm and steadfast in the face of excitement or danger. She could meet strained situations with clowning and could face actual disaster with everything from mental fortitude to expert first aid. She was a thoroughbred; the sort of a girl all men would fall in love with if the men had any sense. So few of us have.

Deaf to the jibes of everyone who insisted that she too was seasick, she missed four meals straight, content to let the deck steward

bring her food from the galley while she sat on the promenade deck with the wan Mr. Somme. Once, finding her alone, I asked her what progress she was making. She flushed and turned on me sharply.

"Keep your shirt on," I said hurriedly. "I mean what progress are you making in getting the gent to eat?"

"Oh that," she said. "None."

"Not a bite?"

"I know you think I don't care much for this strange Mr. Somme, but honestly he interests me. I resent him, yes; but I'm fascinated by him, too."

"It's odd you should say that," she replied. "Because he seems to be attracted to you, or rather to your profession. Yet he seems afraid of you."

"Afraid of me?"

"Yes, I can't explain it. And to tell the truth, Pete, I am a little frightened of him—and fascinated too. He says strange things sometimes; seems to utter words in a strange tongue without knowing he has done so. When I ask him what he has said, he stares at me incredulously."

"What does he talk about? If that's any business of mine."

"It's nothing private, silly. He talks mostly about France. It's the only country he knows and he loves it. When I spoke of Mexico this morning he got up abruptly and disappeared."

"Disappeared?"

"Yes. Walked off!"

I wondered about that a little; then our conversation drifted to other things.

An odd thing happened when he were twenty-four hours out of Havana. We had stopped off the coast of Yucatan to await the tender that comes out to pick up passengers for Progreso. Clouds obscured the coast line. I was sitting alone not far from Mr. Somme who was near the rail. He looked more pale and drawn than usual; and not without cause, considering his fasting. Suddenly one of the cruise passengers standing near the rail turned to a young chap who acted as cruise director and said, "Is that Progreso?"

"Yes," said the director. "The clouds are lifting now. You can't see much, but it's our first glimpse of Mexico."

"Is it far from Progreso to Merida and Chichen-Itza and all those Mayan ruins, or Aztec or whatever they are?" someone asked.

The rest of the conversation escaped me; for Mr. Somme suddenly stood up and as a man in a trance moved toward the rail. I watched for a moment, half-contemptuous of what I felt was another manifestation of a silly pose of some sort. But suddenly I was convinced that the man, entranced or not, was about to jump overboard.

No one else had noticed. I jumped up and went toward him. He saw me and turned back, throwing me a tragic pleading look as if he were most anxious not to have the little episode known to the other passengers. I nodded casually and went below to watch the tender take two of our passengers aboard. But before I left him I felt again that sepulchral chill that I had experienced the moment we first met.

The following day as I stood watching Vera Cruz take on form and color, Mr. Somme came and stood beside me. I felt he wished to say something and did not know how to begin. Though I told myself I wasn't interested in anything he might say, that was not precisely true. Despite his monopoly of Harriet's time, I could not help feeling a friendly interest in the man.

"Have you ever visited Mexico before?" I asked, making conversation. He seemed oddly upset by the question.

"Yes—" he said, then stopped. "That is, no. No! I have never visited it." He was embarrassed by his own strange answer and in his embarrassment started to fumble with a long envelope which he half drew from an inner pocket. I marveled again at his queer behavior, yet I felt a strange pity for him. So I said, "It's my first visit, too. Possibly we can see some of the wonders of the country together." Knowing how self-contained he had been, I was astonished when he seemed literally to jump at my suggestion.

"Yes," he said. "Let's go together." Then, in a lowered voice, "at least as far as we can." There was some significance in that remark that did not escape me, though it certainly was enigmatic.

Our landing and boarding the train for Mexico City were uneventful. Morning saw us high on the central plateau. Rising early I found Mr. Somme already on the observation platform. He was leaning over the side peering ahead.

"Bit smoky that, isn't it?" I said. He sat down without replying.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Approaching Teotihuacan," he said; and his voice was husky.

From the station in Teotihuacan can be seen the ancient Aztec ruins that lie beyond the present Spanish town, while beyond the

ruins rise the centuries-old pyramids of the Sun and the Moon. I had not realized that the rail line passed so close to these relics of a dead civilization. I turned to speak to Somme but his appearance stopped the speech in my throat. He was leaning far over the rail of the observation platform, straining his vision toward the pyramids; and his face was as white as death.

I was relieved when, an hour later, we reached Buena Vista station in Mexico City. For despite our shipboard conversation Mr. Somme and I had made no plans actually to spend any time together. But I did have a final contact with him which was the most disconcerting of all. As I stood bargaining with the taxi drivers, Mr. Somme, who had already engaged his cab, came and handed me a long envelope. I recognized it as the one he had had on the ship.

"This is an imposition," he said, "but I feel that someone should know, and possibly you will understand—or at least believe!" He fairly shouted these last four words, then hurriedly climbed into his cab. Inside, he spoke again through the window.

"Please don't open that for a few days. Wait until you hear . . ." The cab leaped forward and the rest of the sentence was lost, though I was sure he mentioned Teotihuacan. I glanced at the envelope which was addressed simply, "Prof. Sears." My first impulse was to open it on the spot but he had said I was to wait a few days. What did that mean? After an irresolute minute, I shoved the letter into my pocket and dismissed the whole affair from my mind.

In the hotel, Harriet met me at the desk.

"Have you seen Mr. Somme?" she asked.

"Yes, at the station. He must have gone to another hotel," I said.

"No, he said he was coming here. No one has seen him."

"Then he'll be along," I assured her. "Have lunch with me?"

"Well, I—if—that is—"

"I understand. You might have a date with Somme. Okay! Join me if you can. I'll be in my room or here in the lobby at one."

"Thanks, Pete. You'll probably hear from me." I followed the bellhop to my room. I had been alone but a few minutes when the boy returned.

"Here's a message for you, Mr. Sears. Just arrived."

I took the envelope and recognized Somme's writing. Out of simple curiosity, I opened it, though the strangeness of the mysterious Mr. Somme was beginning to bore me a little. Harriet, I reflected, was making a fool of herself over a rather unhealthy-looking ec-

centric. I felt inclined just then to chuck the whole matter and set out to see Mexico. But the affair was not so easily avoided. The envelope contained two notes, folded together. The first read:

Mr. Sears—

This is presumptuous but you have seemed friendly and I must turn to someone. This may not seem to make sense but I can only ask you to bear with me for a few days. You have grown fond of Miss Manning, as who would not? Please show her the enclosed note and tell her it explains everything. Later, if it is possible to keep the truth from her please do so. She has meant much to me these last few days. Thanks again for your kindness.

Xometlapayac

I looked at the signature again. Obviously, the note was from our shipmate, Sonme. What was the Xometlapayac? Could we have had it wrong all the time? Why hadn't he corrected us? Without further speculation I unfolded the second note.

Dear Sears—

Writing such a note as this is cowardly, I suppose, but the simple fact is that I can't face Miss Manning. She was very kind to me on the ship but—well, I have important business here and simply cannot waste a minute. Would you be good enough to explain? You may show Miss Manning this letter if you wish.

Cordially,

Xometlapayac

Naturally, I was relieved to learn that the Sonme-Manning affair was ended; but despite the fact that this latter note was obviously window dressing engaged in for some obscure reason I was annoyed by the fellow's insolence. But beyond all other emotions was one of half pity, half dread that crept over me whenever I thought of the man. And there was that name again; not French, but Aztec, unmistakably.

At twelve-thirty when I returned from a stroll, a call from Harriet awaited me. Her voice, when I called her, showed agitation.

"Do you mind eating right away? I want to talk," she said.

"I'll see you in the lobby in ten minutes." I hurried, but she was there first.

"I haven't heard from him," she said hopelessly.

"Perhaps he's busy."

"He couldn't be too busy to telephone. Besides, he hasn't registered."

"He might have changed his mind about the hotel."

"No. I've called them all."

"All!"

"All the leading ones. He just isn't registered."

"I didn't know you were really concerned." She blushed at that.

"I'm not. After all he's only a fellow tourist, but he did say he was coming here and I have worried about him since. Do you think he was really seasick?" She did not wait for a reply. "There's something about him that . . ." Here I began to feel again that boredom that had overtaken me before I received his notes. I drew his second letter out of my pocket and handed it to her.

"You've had your leg pulled, my dear," I said. I was glad to notice that the note had the effect for which I had hoped and which Xometlapayac himself had evidently desired. Her eyes flashed.

"What do you make of that signature?" Harriet asked.

"Why we simply misunderstood him; or else he simplified his name for obvious reasons. *Somme* is only the first part of it. An Aztec name would be something of a burden in France."

"Aztec? You mean he's an Indian?"

"Probably Mestizo."

She was silent for a moment. Then, "I've been a fool," she said.

This change in her was so welcome that I found my own attitude toward Xometlapayac subtly changing again. He had made a clean break, and when I looked at Harriet's blond beauty I realized what a sacrifice that might mean. And his other note indicated that all was not well. Then there was that still sealed document he had given me at the station. It was all very mysterious; and now with no more jealousy to occupy my mind, I grew ashamed of my behavior. Here was a chap in trouble. He had turned to me and I had done nothing really in response. I determined to search for him after lunch.

I was so impatient to get started that I excused myself rather abruptly and set about what I fancied was a more systematic search than Harriet had conducted. It was no use. He was not registered anywhere. I called the police. They were of no help. I strolled about town in the hope of running across him. This was futile of course, and at last I gave up the whole thing.

I called Harriet and we had a grand time eating strange foods and wandering in and out of strange places. Her heartache, if it had existed, seemed forgotten. Late in the evening we strolled across the

Alameda and near a tinkling, splashing fountain we sat down on a mosaic bench just to talk nonsense and look at the stars. It was good medicine for both of us.

Imperceptibly we had drawn together, encouraged by the cool night air, when I was sure I saw someone pass close beside me and turned to see who it was. No one was in sight. In that same instant Harriet clutched my arm frenziedly.

"What was that!" she gasped.

"What was what?" I asked as calmly as possible.

"I don't know, but I could have sworn something rose from the ground behind me and went straight up up there." She pointed toward the distant stars.

"How could you have seen it if it was behind you?"

"I . . . what? Oh, I didn't see it, exactly. I—well, I sort of felt it or heard it, or something. Pete, I'm scared."

"Your hands are like ice," I said. "It was probably an owl."

"Do they have owls here?"

"They must have, silly; everybody has owls."

We walked back to the hotel. This was on Thursday evening.

Friday, we did the town in true tourist fashion; but on Saturday morning we set out for Teotihuacan—one of the wonders of Mexico. The highway, our driver explained, was built in part over an old causeway the Aztecs constructed across the lake that once filled the center of the vast Valley of Mexico. The explanation set us to speculating on scenes of the remote past. We talked of the tribal processions across this very causeway to the pyramid we were now approaching.

"It was customary," the driver said, "for them to take a young man of good family and fine physique and 'fatten' him for the gods. 'Fattening' meant putting him in the very best physical condition, feasting him on costly foods, giving him all the comforts and pleasures of the flesh for weeks—after which time he paid for this temporary paradise on earth by being taken to the top of the pyramid and having his heart cut out alive."

Harriet shivered when I translated this for her and, as the driver spoke no English, I added, "After all, you must remember that this chap is getting well paid for his services and feels it is his duty to give us a spinal chill or two. Now a really good guide, one whose soul is in his work, would arrange a special sacrifice for us.

"I can do all right without bloodshed," said Harriet as we drove through the Spanish town of Teotihuacan and came in sight of the ruins of the far older Aztec stronghold. It was only eight o'clock, and, as we had hoped, there was no one about except two small Indian boys outside the walls of the old palace who sold us pottery and jewels of native obsidian and fire opals. When we started toward the pyramids they both ran after us crying, "*No vaya al pirámide, señor! No vaya, señor!*" Their voices were full of excitement and it seemed to me, of fear.

"What are they saying?" asked Harriet.

"They are telling us not to go to the pyramid."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Wait." I walked to the driver who stood apart now with the boys listening while they talked and gesticulated wildly, mixing many Indian words with their Spanish and pointing frequently at the pyramid of the Sun, the larger and nearer of the two.

"They say there was quite a commotion on the pyramid last night."

"Commotion?"

"Yes. A flicker of flame was seen early in the evening and the Indians declared they saw dark figures moving about in the light of the flame. This was followed by sound as of a tom-tom but one so distant as to resemble more the soft sound of blood dripping on stone."

I translated for Harriet and added, "This bird is giving us everything but the actual sacrifice. The kids must work with him regularly." I turned again to the driver. "Why," I asked, "isn't everyone around here showing some interest if they were so excited last night?"

"No one was excited," he replied. "This happens every year at the time of the winter solstice. The priests' method of coaxing the Sun back when he had wandered away to the South was to appease Huitzilopochtli, who controlled the Sun, by offering a sacrifice. The Indians believe the old ritual still goes on, though none of them has the courage to climb the pyramid during the fancied ceremony to see for himself. In fact, nothing could induce one of them to go up there before none on the day after the sacrifice."

"Before noon?"

"Yes. Afternoon it is all right. Don't ask me why."

"Has anything ever justified their beliefs?"

"Nothing. The pyramid has been exactly as you see it ever since

the coming of Cortez. It is visited almost daily by tourists and no evidence of a revival of Aztec ritual has ever been reported."

"They don't try to stop visitors on this particular day?" I asked.

"They?" It was an eloquent question, for the plain about us was deserted save for the two small *ninos* now retreating toward the sleepy little Spanish town. I laughed and turned again to the pyramids. We had the place to ourselves.

The pyramid of the Sun is high and steep, though there are several decks, or levels, where one may rest. On the highest of these landings we had stopped to mop our brows when, right there in the morning sun, I felt a chill as marked as any mid-winter draft in the North. But it was different; it was not of this earth, but a draft as from some place remote in time and space that had invaded this sunny world and blown one icy breath against my cheek ere it was gone. That icy breath again. I thought at once of Xometlapayac and instinctively looked down to see if he or anyone else were following us. The surrounding plain was deserted. We started up the final ascent. The driver, showing the way, reached the summit first. Gaining the top in a final sprint, he hesitated, half turned and then, attempting to speak, simply crumpled up and lay in a heap on the very edge of the altar platform.

"Too much for his heart," I said as Harriet and I rushed up to his aid. We were starting to examine his heart when the view that had met his eye met ours and we too became weak and all but fainted.

On a raised slab in the middle of the small area before us lay the rigid, nearly naked body of a man, dark yet pallid through his natural swarthinness; pallid with good cause. For a great hole had been cut in his left side and his heart had been removed and placed on a higher slab beyond. A great pool of blood surrounded the pedestal on which the body lay, and it was no doubt the sight of this as much as anything that had felled our driver. But that was not the thing which shocked us most. Harriet's hand grasped mine with icy fingers as we looked upon the familiar features of the victim—the features of the missing Xometlapayac.

We stood paralyzed for minutes—or seconds. It seemed an age. Impulsively Harriet started forward and I stopped her. As I did so, I dropped my handkerchief which I had in my hand during the climb. The quick movement brought Harriet to her senses and she turned away from the horrible scene. I retrieved my handkerchief, relieved that it had missed the coagulating blood. Then we busied ourselves

with the driver who was very much alive but was still unconscious and could not be roused. At last, desperately anxious to get away from that spot, I took him over my shoulder—fortunately he was under average stature—and went down the steep stairway, with Harriet still white as a ghost, leading the way.

There was no one at the base of the pyramid when, after several stops enroute, I arrived with my inert burden. Nor was there anyone near the car which was parked beside the museum that houses relics of Aztec days. I put the driver in the car and looked for help. Near the museum flows a small stream. I knelt and dipped my handkerchief in the clear water. As I immersed it, I noticed that it was streaked with red and that the water about it was ever so faintly colored. The handkerchief had gotten some blood on it after all.

Returning to the car, we were astonished to find the driver sitting behind the wheel, stretching and yawning.

"Well!" he said, "I fell asleep. Hope you haven't been waiting." His voice was so matter-of-fact that Harriet, who did not understand a word he had said, gasped. I laid a hand on her arm.

"Let's see what he has to say," I said. We got in. As he started the car he said, laughing. "I had the most vivid dream imaginable just because of those kids and their story."

"What did you dream?"

"Oh, I thought I went up the pyramid with you instead of sleeping in the back seat as I always do; and when we got up there—Lord, that was vivid!" The fellow looked around with a puzzled, half-scared expression. "I thought there was one of those human sacrifices up there. My God, I hope I never dream that again."

"Where is the nearest police station?" I asked.

"Police, *senor*?"

"Yes, I have something to report."

"If I have done anything—"

"No. It's nothing like that. Just stop at the first police office. There must be one in Teotihuacan." There was, and I drew a sleepy-looking sergeant aside and told him the whole story. He listened politely.

"It looks to me," I concluded, "as if someone had borrowed an idea from the ancient residents and dealt Xometlapayac a terrible death."

"Thank you, *senor*," said the sergeant and he smiled. Then he winked. "Anything can happen here," he said. "This is the heart of the tequila country." I was furious. Tequila! I had tasted it but once

and had not liked it.

"Tequila!" I sputtered, "Tequila!" He laid a hand on my shoulder. "Please do not be offended; I merely meant that tequila causes many strange crimes."

"You'll send someone immediately?"

"Send someone? No sir, I shall go myself with two of my best men. Will you join us?" This sounded more sensible.

"No, I shouldn't like to see that again. But naturally we'll wait here until you can investigate, though I hope it won't take too long."

Again he looked at me with the suggestion of a twinkle in his eye. "I may not need to detain you. Have you any papers of identification?"

"Why, yes." I produced mine.

"And the lady?" Harriet had her tourist card. He passed the documents back. "Quite satisfactory," he said. "Now if you'll give me your card and the name of your hotel and will promise to assist if needed, I shall not keep you any longer."

Once more, I thought I noticed an odd gleam in his eye but I was more interested in getting away than in anything else just then. I thanked him and we hurried out. I was a bit perturbed however, when, glancing back as the car started, I saw the sergeant through the open door of the office. He was seated again and, newspaper in hand, was swinging his feet onto the desk.

Harriet and I talked all the way to the city. Georgia and some of the tourist group were going to the pyramids that afternoon and we hurried to warn them. But when we reached the hotel they had gone.

"Possibly," said Harriet, "they will learn about it in Teotihuacan and will not go on. I hate to think of Georgia climbing up there and finding that, that—ugh!"

"Of course they'll hear about it," I said as reassuringly as possible. But I could not forget the coolness of that police sergeant with his newspaper.

Naturally we talked the morning away. We speculated on Xometlapayac's connections, his possible family. We wondered where he had registered.

"By Jove!" I said, jumping up so suddenly Harriet almost fainted. "I have a letter he gave me at the station. Come on!" We rushed to my room and opened the document.

Mr. Sears: (we read). This is an imposition but it will seem less so to you than to most men because of your studies of races, customs,

peoples, etc. The world would call it luck which placed you on the same ship with me during my last voyage on earth but I know of course it was the will of Huitzilopochtli. I shall ask you not to open this until my mission is completed. Huitzilopochtli will guide you in that. The gods may decree that I have sinned in giving you this account of what must seem to you a barely credible sequence of events. But I have worshipped Christian gods, too, and they will protect me if I aid the knowledge of white men. I shall be brief for we are approaching Vera Cruz and soon there will be no more time for writing.

I was born in Mexico City twenty-eight years ago. You will hardly believe I enjoyed an unusually fine physique but it is no exaggeration to say that my physical development was far above the average. It was often remarked that barring accident, I should live to a tremendous age. But of course, that was impossible. For Huitzilopochtli, god of the Aztecs, decreed ages ago just which of the Aztec youths were to be given to him in each generation, throughout all eternity.

When the Spaniards invaded Mexico they brought new gods and announced that the old ones were dead. Many Aztec people accepted the gods of the white man but the renunciation of Huitzilopochtli could not alter the fact that certain of us in each generation—one each year—are destined to be sacrificed. I knew the hour that was appointed for me but I thought I might escape because my father, an Aztec, married a white woman from France. Upon his death, when I was twelve, my mother took me to France to live.

There, in the pleasant country south of Limoges, I forgot the Aztec lore. But one thing I could not forget was the fact that I was destined to become a sacrifice to Huitzilopochtli. I tried to tell myself that it was only a superstition, that the old gods were dead, and that no Christian and Frenchman need think of such things. And I nearly succeeded.

Then, a number of weeks ago, I became the guest of a rich nobleman who lived in barbaric, licentious luxury. The invitation was one that could hardly be refused; and indeed I had no special foreboding at first, for I had dismissed the thought of my predestined fate.

It was not until I had been visiting at the chateau Mont-Fleurance for a fortnight that I realized what the luxury of my surroundings might mean—the fattening for sacrifice! The realization, while I denied it to myself, made me more reckless, more abandoned in the pursuit of pleasure. This, of course, had been decreed by the gods long ago. But I grew cunning. I loved this ready satisfaction of all desires and I resolved to cheat old Huitzilopochtli. I would enjoy the luxuries he had provided and would rob him of his sacrifice by simply staying away from Mexico. But I did not reckon with the might of Huitzilopochtli. He understood my little plan almost before it was conceived; and on the appointed day he struck.

A French girl of good family and her still youthful mother were also guests at the chateau. A young nobleman, one Victor LeMaire, was desperately in love with the girl. He was poor and proud and noble and was laughed at by the rich snobs with whom the Duc de Mont-Fleurance had surrounded himself. This young Victor heard that I had in-

duced his sweetheart to visit a lavish hunting lodge the Duc maintained on the estate, and that I planned we should spend the night there.

It was the day appointed for me to ascend the pyramid and surrender myself to Huitzilopochtli. Five days after the formal surrender—five days of ceremonies and final fasting on my part—it would be time for me to give my heart to the god. I sat on a terrace overlooking the sea and watched the sun sink low. In a little while I was to meet the girl and take her to the lodge. I smiled as I thought of old Huitzilopochtli. He would be fuming with rage out there where the sun was sinking. Evening drew on, but so beautiful were the sky and the slender crescent moon which followed the sun into the water that I sat for a long time and thought of the pleasant days through which I was living and of the brave new days to come. For now the sun had set on that fatal day and I was remote from Mexico. Old Huitzilopochtli was cheated and defeated at last.

But my reckoning was wrong. The hour of sunset there in Mont-Fleurance was high noon in Teotihuacan. The sun's last rays would gild the top of the great pyramid just as midnight came to Mont-Fleurance. I never thought of that as I went to the manor house to call for the sweetheart of the jealous Victor. It was late when we set out for the nearby lodge. It was midnight when a threatening figure rose up from behind a hedge and blocked our path. The girl uttered a muffled shriek. The young Frenchman faced me. At once I knew that Huitzilopochtli was not to be denied. My hands went up in a gesture of resignation which the infuriated youth took to be a threatening move. Without more ado he plunged a knife into my left side, below the heart. The knife was in the hands of a Frenchman five thousand miles from Teotihuacan, but I knew it was really plunged into me by an Aztec priest. My day of surrender had come. The day of final sacrifice was not far off.

I fell. The young murderer stood over me. Then he threw the knife far from him and fled. The girl mercifully swooned. I tried to rise but I had no strength.

Then, suddenly, I was on my feet and I was overwhelmed by a great sound. At first it was like the tremendous roar of angry sea many times multiplied. But as I tried to shut it out of my ears it resolved itself into a terrible voice commanding me in the name of Huitzilopochtli to give up that portion of myself which he could claim. And suddenly I knew, as one in a dream instinctively will know, that I was not really dead, not wholly dead; that the white man's knife had killed only the white man in me. The sacrifice had not yet been made. Only a white man's murder had been committed. But my true death was inevitable now. I glanced down at the dark path and saw my body, wounded and bleeding.

I felt I should gather it up and I made a move to do so when I heard someone coming. The girl stirred. Never have I been so frightened. Suddenly consciousness left me and when I awoke it was as if an age had passed, though I knew somehow that only one night was gone. When I awoke I stood on the sunny deck of a steamship heading west

from Havana to Mexico, enroute to the final sacrifice. I who could not wholly die in one land but must still spill my Aztec blood in the manner prescribed by Aztec gods, answered the command of the great Huitzilopochtli. It was on that ship that we met, sir. The rest of my story you know."

The tale ended abruptly. Harriet and I stared at each other. Obviously, the man had been mad; yet with a madness that was convincing and terrifying. I cast about for something to do.

"We must find out more about him," I said. "I'll telephone the steamship office." I went to the telephone. There was a delay in getting the connection. While I was thus engaged, Georgia entered her room down the hall. Some of the pyramid party were with her and to our amazement they were laughing and in seeming high spirits. Harriet went to talk to them.

While she was gone I got through to the steamship office and asked if they could give me the permanent address of Mr. Xometlapayac, who had come to Vera Cruz on the S. S. Toluca. There was another delay while they looked it up and Harriet reentered the room as the telephone came to life again. I got the message, then hung up as I saw the expression on Harriet's face.

"What did the steamship office say?" she asked.

"The fools can't find his name on the passenger list. I'll have to call again."

"It's no use," she said and her voice was full of incredulity. "They climbed the pyramid just after noon. There was nothing there. Nothing!"

I went back with Harriet on the return trip of the Toluca and the voyage was very satisfactory. When two people have dreamed a dream together, even if the dream has been a nightmare, no strangeness lies between them. Yet, was it all a dream? Xometlapayac's document is substantial and palpable. I still have it. When I read it again and when I look at that handkerchief of mine, still faintly blood-stained, I wonder.

A Husband's Right

Mickey Mouse, Jr., was discussing his impending marriage with his father. Mickey Senior said, "Son, when you marry are you going to be a man and demand your husband's right the first night, or be a mouse and wait for the second night. Mickey Junior said, "Dad, I'm a rat. I did it last night."

The Modern Fantasy Poll!

What do your friends think of fantasy and science fiction questions? Ask them and take your own Gallop poll. We pay \$5.00 for each report published.

Today's Fantasy Poll Question: Do you think it possible for one human being to transmit his thoughts to another?

It's never happened to me but I don't see why it shouldn't. I knew an old woman once who could tell every time her son was coming home which must have been some sort of telepathy. Why should we assume it can't happen just because it's never done nothing for us? If it could happen to one, it could happen to anybody.

Bert Hertzstein, the Bronx.

I think it's ridiculous to think that some person can send a message to another one just by thinking it. If that could be done then the next step would be reading everybody's mind and that would be simply terrible. Why, I'd have a terrible time with my boy friends if they could tell what's on my mind.

Julie Bertram, West End Ave.

I've done it, sure as you're alive! It was when my husband was living and I was lots younger and our house caught fire. I was alone and John was down at Wall street where he worked and when the house caught fire I wished just powerful hard that John could get home fast to take care of things, and bless your heart if he didn't show up in a taxi thirty minutes later. Said he knewed I was in trouble and he left the office flat and come runnin'. John and I could do it all right.

Mrs. Louella Gains, West 86th.

There are many authenticated instances of thought transference. I detest work. I avoid work, as you may have noticed. This is my regular bench from April to October. Very often people give me the eye and I read their thoughts. They say "There's a bum." They are right but if they could read my thoughts they would add "There is the only happy man in New York." Indeed, I believe in the power of the intellect. Mine has enabled me to live comfortably in the open air for almost seventy years.

The Professor, Bowery.

There's entirely too much attention paid to such nonsense. If more men would pay attention to their wives and more women would stay home and keep their houses the way they ought to be, there'd be less trouble. Why worry about spirit worlds when there's so much mischief in this one.

Miss Lillian Reshoff, East 59th.

Well, I don't know. I don't see how it could be and yet I think it ought to be. If I was making the world over I'd certainly see to it that such a thing was possible but then I'm not making it over and I've never met anyone who knew of anyone even who could pass his thoughts to anyone else so I guess I'll have to say yes and no.

Dominic Vitale, 122nd St.

This poll was made in Central Park, N. Y. Take a poll of at least six people wherever you live. Send their replies and names to the Fantasy Poll, Fantasy Stories, 420 Lexington, New York.

Here's your next Fantasy Poll—If you had a chance to visit the moon and return safely, would you take it?

Answers to Scientifictional Knowledge Quiz

1-b	8-c	15-c
2-c	9-b	16-b
3-b	10-b	17-c
4-b	11-a	18-a
5-c	12-b	19-b or c
6-c	13-b	20-ah, that's the
7-a	14-c	\$64 question!

HOW YOU RATE

A score of 20 correct means you're an Einstein (j. g.), a Gray Lensman, an Odd John, a Slan-about-Town.

15-19: You must have started reading science fiction before your father was born.

9-14: You need to study future issues of FANTASY STORIES to get hep on your definitions.

3-8: If this is your age, then your score is excusable.

One of the Ten Best

Walter Winchell prints many beautiful fables, but certainly one of his "best ten of all-time" is the following. He wrote, "FDR once illustrated the meaning of the Yuletide spirit by spinning this one. A thief broke into the home of a priest and stole his purse. That night the priest wrote in his diary, 'Let me be thankful. First because I was never robbed before. Second because although he took my purse he did not take my life. Third because although he took all I possessed it was not much. And fourth because it was I who was robbed—not I who robbed.'"

Half and Half

A female fantasy writer was gathering material in Alaska for a Martian attack on the world via the Bering Sea. She reports visiting an Eskimo girl who was carrying a remarkable looking baby.

"What a lovely child," she said. "A full-blooded Eskimo?"

"Half," said the girl.

"Half what? Half Eskimo, Irish, Scotch, Russian?"

"Coast Guard," the girl said.

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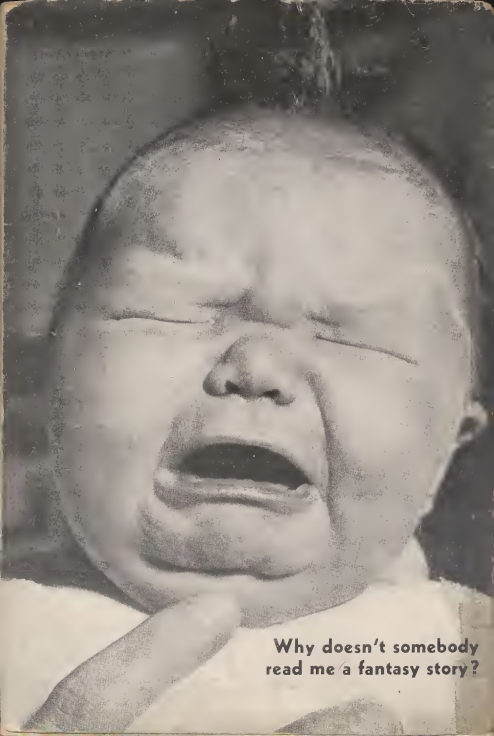
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